

Pretty Rose Hall

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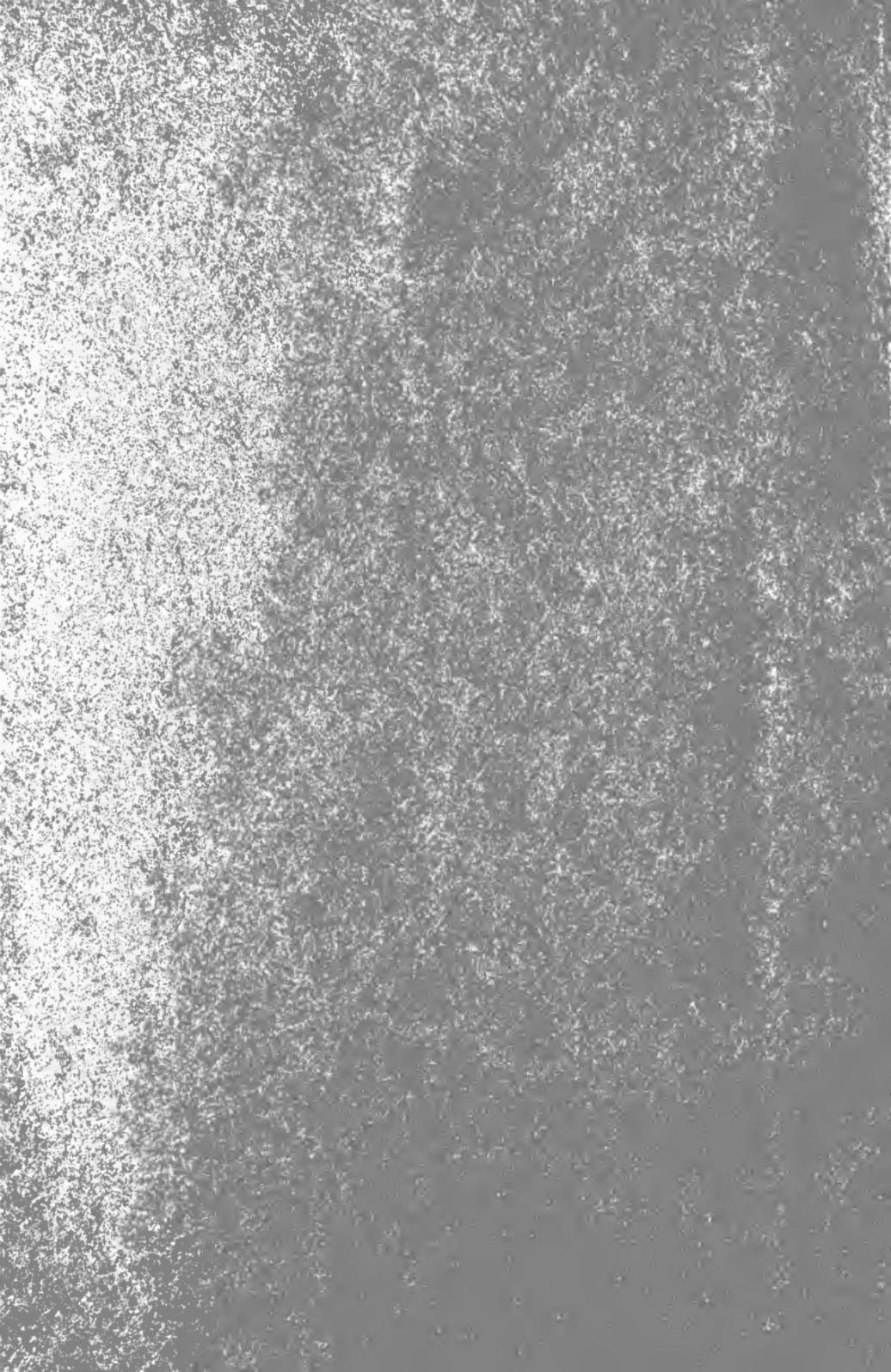
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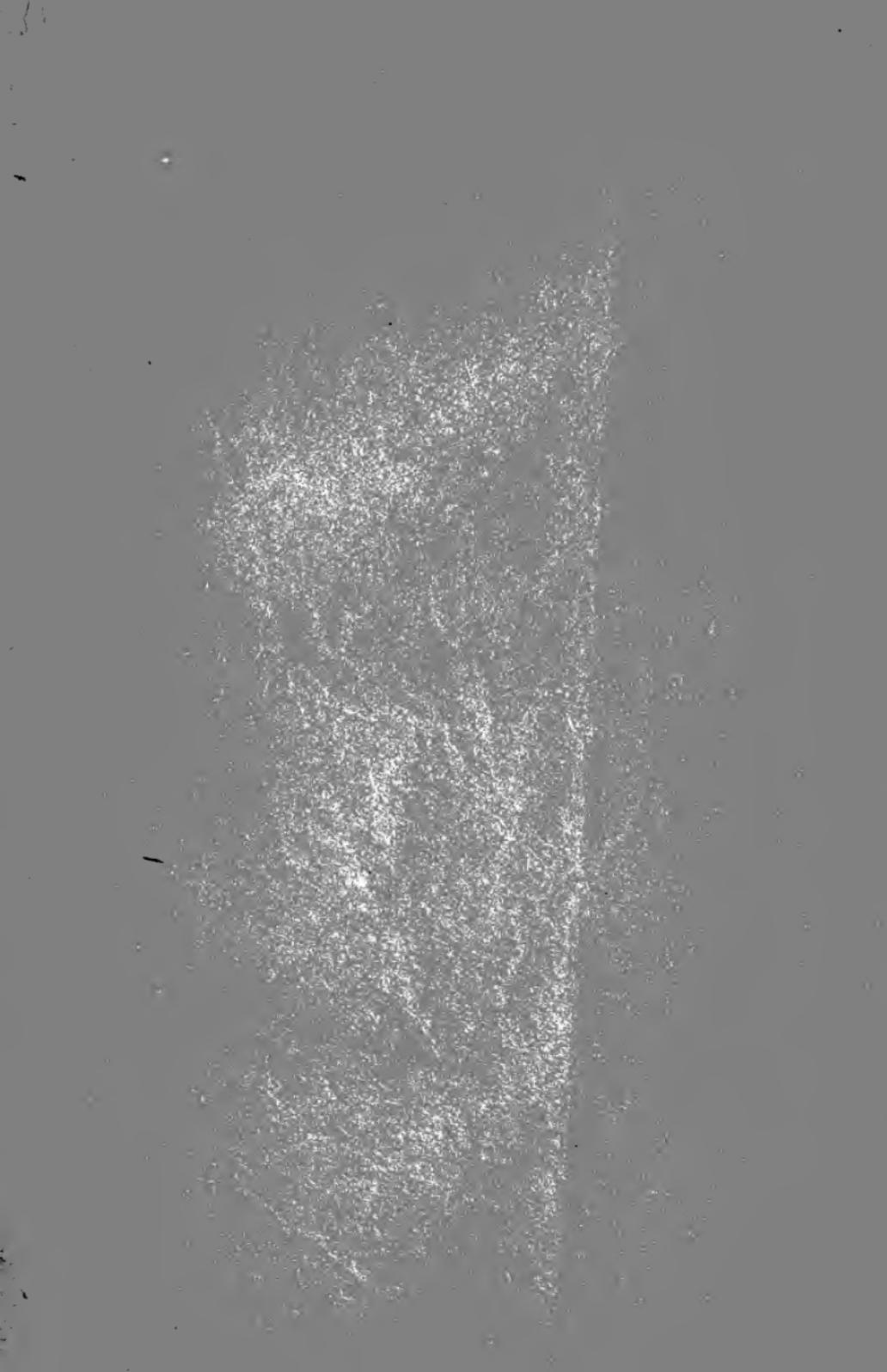


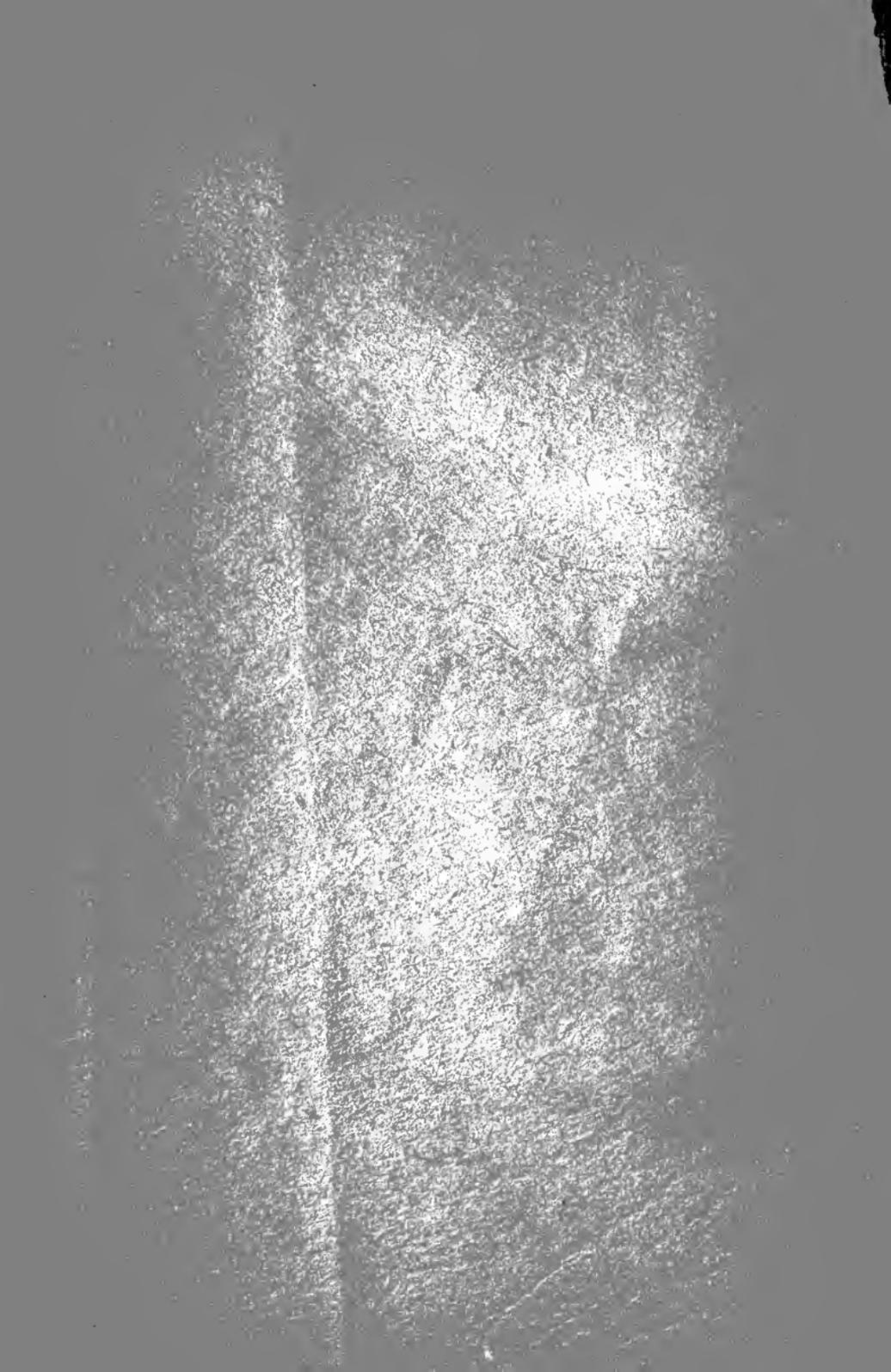
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PRETTY ROSE HALL

OR

The Power of Love

BY

LAURA JEAN LIBBEY

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PRETTY ROSE HALL

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The Power of Love

CHAPTER I.

“Rose—Rose! where can she be? Aunt Hulda will be so very angry with her when she discovers what she has done.”

The words were uttered in a sweet anxious voice, by a fair-haired young girl in a blue sailor suit, with a sailor hat crushed down over her fair curls, who ran lightly down the narrow strip of beach to the water's edge, and shading her tear-swollen blue eyes with her little white hands, looked eagerly over the vast expanse of wave rippling and dancing under the golden light of the June sunshine.

“It is almost noon and Rose has been gone since early morning; what could have detained her? what if anything has happened to her, our beautiful, daring, willful Rose!”

Lillian Hall's heart gave a quick terrified throb at the bare thought.

With a thoughtful face she turned and retraced her steps to the old light-house, that stood like a monu-

ment in gray stone on this little island on the Maine coast.

Lillian and Rose Hall were the nieces of Abel Martin, the old light-house keeper. A strange mystery shrouded their presence here. Why two young and startlingly lovely girls were forced to dwell within the dreary walls of the isolated old light-house, where no human eye, save that of Abel Martin and his wife Hulda, ever dwelt upon their wondrous beauty, is the story we have to tell.

Lillian was seventeen; Rose a year younger.

Lillian was sweet and good with the fair beauty of an angel, but Rose—ah, how shall I find words to describe the dark, passionate, glowing beauty of Rose Hall—the young girl whose life held so tragic a story. A dark, piquant, dimpled face; cheeks and lips as crimson as the glowing heart of the flowers whose name she bore; great, dark, velvety, Oriental eyes shaded by the longest and silkiest of lashes, a low, broad brow crowned with rings of curling love-locks, darker than a raven's plume, and a saucy smiling mouth that seemed made only for love's sweet kisses, and rippling laughter.

Lillian was gentle and good. Rose, gay, dashing, restless Rose, was full of faults; at once the torment and darling of the light-house. With all her faults, imperious, willful, beautiful Rose, was the best loved and most carefully guarded.

On this June morning a strange event shrouded in the deepest mystery happened, which was to break up forever the peace and quiet of the inmates of the light-house on the isolated island.

Late that morning a stranger had visited the island,

placing in Abel Martin's hands a thick square package in a large official envelope, bearing a foreign post mark. The moment the old light-house keeper's eyes fell upon it—even before he took it in his shaking hands, he knew but too well what it contained, that which he most dreaded had happened at last.

Neither Lillian or Rose saw the stranger come or saw him depart. Together, with bated breath, Abel Martin and his wife, Hulda, scanned the folded slip of paper which bore their names, slowly reading the command written there.

“Oh, my God!” cried Hulda, pale as death, with intense excitement, “it is too late to think of such a thing after all these years. It must not, it shall not be. I would rather see them both dead and buried,” she cried out, bitterly, covering her head with her gingham apron, and rocking herself to and fro in utter abandon. “Abel,” she cried, creeping up to him and laying her trembling hand on his arm, “I am strongly tempted to throw this letter into the sea, oh, so bitterly, cruelly tempted. It would be better for both Lillian and Rose,” she added, hoarsely. “No one could prove that we received it, despite what the messenger may say. It is for us to deny it.”

“Duty is duty, Hulda,” replied the old light-house keeper, in a voice equally as husky as her own. “Remember, the choice is left with the girls. I will stake my life upon it neither of them will decide—”

He did not finish the sentence, a light step sounded on the gravel walk outside the door, and Lillian entered.

She had quite expected to hear the question from

her aunt's lips, "Where is Rose?" and she knew that she must answer truthfully.

"Rose has disobeyed you, Aunt Hulda, she has taken the little boat and gone out upon the water some hours since."

Then she would put her arms around Aunt Hulda's neck, and with tears in her eyes plead for pardon for beautiful, willful Rose.

To her great surprise the question was not asked, instead a startling announcement fell from her aunt's lips.

"Lillian," she said, caressing the girl's fair hair, and striving to choke back her bitter sobs and speak calmly, "I have a—a—little—surprise in store for you and Rose. You must both dress yourselves as quickly as possible, we are to start within the hour for Rocky Point. We may be gone a week, perhaps a fortnight."

Lillian looked up aghast. All her life both she and Rose had pleaded for the privilege of accompanying their aunt or uncle when they made their periodical trips to Rocky Point, and it had been strictly denied them. What prompted her aunt to propose it now she could not even conjecture.

"We can not start within the hour, aunt," she faltered, "Rose is not here," and in her gentle way she confessed what Rose had done.

She expected a torrent of rage, instead her aunt stood looking at her with a look in her eyes she could not fathom.

There was a terrible war raging just then in Hulda Martin's bosom. Had Providence a hand in absenting Rose from the island on this fatal day when all her future was at stake? Had fate a hand in it?

A swift and terrible temptation occurred to her. Why not leave Rose behind and spare her? Not but what she loved Lillian; but, ah! she loved Rose best. If Rose could but be spared!

Fiercely the battle between right and wrong waged in the woman's soul. It was over at last—wrong had triumphed over right. For weal or for woe, she had shaped Rose's fate.

"Then you and I will go, Lillian," she said, steadily. "Rose shall stop at home; we must start within the hour."

"Oh, no; let us wait for Rose!" cried gentle Lillian, in dismay. "How could I remain away from her a whole week—I, who have never been separated from her an hour in her life?"

Despite Lillian's anxious pleading, Hulda Martin was inexorable. If Rose was not on hand they would go without her.

Half an hour later they had left the island.

"By not taking Rose I have spared her," was the exultant thought that filled Hulda Martin's heart.

The boat containing Hulda Martin and Lillian had scarcely faded from sight ere a young girl came rowing over the sunlit waters in a little skiff. It was the truant Rose.

"Dear me!" she cried, tying the fluttering crimson ribbon more securely under her dimpled chin with her slim brown fingers, and puckering her jetty brows into something very like a frown, "it looks like rain—and a terrible rain-storm, too—or I should not think of going home for at least an hour yet; but Lillian will be lonely. Yes, I must go home."

Still, it was so pleasant out on the water the girl did

not put her resolution into execution until the great rain-drops splashing upon her face startled her.

Abel Martin sat smoking his pipe in the doorway of the light-house as Rose came running up the steep path, flinging the rain from her long black curls.

"I suppose the storm blew you in," he remarked.

Rose laughed.

"Where's Lillian, uncle?" she asked, glancing around in surprise.

"Ay, ay, lass; that's just what I was about to tell you," he said slowly, "and there's no use in your fussing and storming about it. Your aunt and Lillian have gone to Rocky Point for a few days. You wasn't on hand; you stole away for a lark on the water all by yourself, so now you are to pay the penalty by stopping at home here"

"But I won't!" cried Rose, stormily, breaking into a paroxysm of angry tears. "I will follow them to Rocky Point, even if it were storming twice as hard!" she cried, stamping her foot. "It was infamous not to take me!" and the willful little beauty threw herself down in Lillian's arm-chair, sobbing as though her heart would break.

A week at the lonely old light-house, with only her uncle and old Deborah, the servant, for companions! How could she ever endure it? how could she live through it?

She made up her mind to follow them as soon as the storm should show signs of abating, for she well knew no boat could live on the water just then.

And when pretty, willful Rose once made up her mind to do anything, all opposition was in vain.

But as the night came on the terrible storm in-

creased. It was the worst night that had been known on the Maine coast for years.

"Heaven help the vessels out on the water to-night," old Abel muttered as he hobbled up the steep steps to the tower to light the beacon lights.

The wind outside howled like a banshee; the great waves mountain high lashed into fury by the mad, driving storm, broke with a fearful roar over the gray walls of the light-house till it trembled and rocked on its foundation.

The sea-gulls, breasting the white-capped, curling waves, mingled their terrible screams with the wild warring of the tempest. The rain fell in torrents; thunder and vivid forks of lightning were belched forth from the ink-black sky.

It seemed as if the very flood-gates of heaven were opened wide to drown the quivering earth on this terrible and memorable night.

Rose Hall had followed her uncle to the tower and together they lighted the lamps, both praying that no vessel was out breasting the fearful storm—to have need of the signals in the tower to warn them off the dangerous rocks.

Hark! what was it that sounded over the fierce roar of the maddened elements. Rose and her uncle strain their ears to listen. The sound is repeated in quick succession.

Boom! boom! boom!

They looked at each other with white, startled faces; they know it is a ship in distress signaling for help. Those on board have seen the danger signal; but, alas, the huge waves which they are powerless to resist

are dashing their vessel each moment nearer the fatal rocks.

Rose Hall by the momentary flashes of bright, white lightning watches the terrible scene with horror-stricken eyes.

In the meteoric light she sees a life-boat has been lowered, and it is already full. Another flash and she sees dark forms frantically pacing the deck, and as she gazes those who have been left upon the fated vessel cast themselves into the raging sea. Then darkness reigns.

Rose Hall rises with a panting cry and springs toward the narrow stairway with a white, set face, and reaches for her oil-skin jacket, which always hangs there.

But a heavy hand is laid on the girl's shoulder.

"What would you do, Rose?" cried Abel Martin forcing her back.

Rose points out toward the black sea.

"I am going to save some of them if I can," she cried, hoarsely. "Let me go, Uncle Abel."

"Are you mad, girl?" cried Abel Martin, aghast. "The sea will drag enough poor souls down without you. You are surely mad."

But the girl wrenched herself free from his grasp.

"I can not stand idly by and see them perish. I must try to save them. I am not afraid of the water. You yourself have always said I would never die by drowning. I must try to save some of them. Don't hold me back."

Two soft arms hurriedly clasped the old man's neck. A warm mouth was pressed to his for an instant. Then, swift as a swallow, the girl flew down the old

rickety stairs of the light-house and out into the terrible storm.

The old light-house keeper dashed after the heroic girl with terrible bitter cries. Too late! too late! Tears and prayers alike are useless now. The life-boat of daring Rose Hall was launched upon the terrible sea, the mountain waves rolling high about her.

CHAPTER II.

In an instant the mad waves caught up the little boat and tossed it far out upon the seething waters.

The girl's cheeks paled, but even in her deadly peril her heroic courage did not forsake her.

In the momentary flashes of light she saw that she was nearing the doomed vessel, she could hear the wild cries for help from those struggling in the water, the foremost of whom was but a few rods from her.

He saw the dark object swiftly advancing, and knew it was a life-boat, rescue was at hand.

"Help! help!" he cried, panting with exhaustion.

"Courage, I am coming," Rose answered back in a clear voice, and the next moment her little boat shot up beside him, and he clutched at its side.

"Climb in—steady!" cried Rose, fearful lest the additional heavy weight at the side would upset the boat.

"I fear I can not manage it," groaned the man; "my wrist is sprained and is so painful."

But with Rose's aid it was accomplished; and he sunk down into the bottom of the boat quite exhausted.

The tiny boat would hold no more; so Rose bent again to the oars, striving to reach the beacon lights of the light-house that gleamed in the distance.

In all the years of her after life heroic Rose Hall

never forgot the terrible hour that followed; how the oars were swept from her hands—broken in twain like thin reeds in a gale. How the tiny boat was dashed about, until at last one wave more terrible than the rest, dashed it high upon the rocks of her island home.

The old light-house keeper's joy knew no bounds. She seemed like one given back to him from the grave.

Between them, and with the aid of the old servant they conveyed the stranger, who had swooned from exhaustion, into the house; and the light of the oil lamps falling full upon him, revealed to Rose a fair-haired, handsome young man.

The girl watched him with parted lips; her whole soul in her eyes. It seemed so strange that this stranger should owe his very life to her.

All unmindful that she was wet and cold, and that the sea-water was dripping from her dress, Rose knelt down by the couch and watched them as they poured a strong draught of brandy between the white lips.

At last he opened his eyes and his wondering gaze fell upon Rose's glowing face. And in an instant a recollection of what had happened flashed over him. But in that instant Rose had disappeared.

"Who is that beautiful girl?" cried the stranger, drawing his breath hard; "for a moment I almost believed I was in paradise."

"It is my niece—Rose Hall," answered the old light-house keeper.

"Rose Hall," murmured the stranger; "the name is like a poem," and he added under his breath, "who would have dreamed of meeting such a gloriously beautiful young girl here?" and the same thought that

had flitted through Rose's mind came to him. "To think that I am indebted to her for my life."

All through the long hours of the night, as the stranger tossed restlessly upon the rude couch in the old light-house, listening to the fitful storm outside, he thought of the lovely face of Rose Hall.

"Can it be that I, who have seen some of the fairest of girls and have cared for none of them, am in love at last?"

He laughed to himself, and though the mouth shaded by the golden mustache was handsome, that laugh was not pleasant to hear.

Rose was up with the sun the next morning. A gold-tinted dawn was born of the darksome night, and the girl could almost have thought the terrible proceedings had been but a dream, had it not been for her little boat, quite a wreck, which lay upon the white sands with the broken oars near it.

"Had the handsome stranger gone?" she wondered; "more than likely her uncle had rowed him over to Rocky Point. Should she never see him again?"

Almost in answer to her thoughts, a quick, firm step sounded on the sands, and the object of her thoughts stood before her.

"Miss Rose," he cried, extending one of his hands to her, the other he carried in a sling, "how can I ever thank you for what you have done for me?"

Rose's little brown hand trembled like a fluttering bird in his fervent clasp.

"I only did my duty," she stammered, blushing hotly, her beautiful dark eyes drooping beneath his ardent gaze.

"It is not one's duty to peril one's sweet life for a

stranger, and you did this for me," he said, carrying the hand he held to his lips, then gently releasing it. "It will be a sweet thought to me," he continued, "to know that I owe my life to you. I shall never forget you."

Beautiful, shy Rose was bewildered; she did not know what answer to make him, so the lovely crimson lips were dumb.

A strange pleasure thrilled through her heart, however, at the thought that he had said he should never forget her.

"Your uncle sent me in search of you, Miss Rose," he said. "May I walk back to the light-house with you?"

Rose was a little delighted, a little bewildered, and just a little frightened, but she shyly consented, and together they walked over the white sands.

Osric Lawrence was a clever man, quick of comprehension; he had the great gift of understanding character, and of adapting himself to the people into whose midst he was thrown.

Although he had exchanged but a few words with pretty Rose Hall, he understood her restless nature perfectly. She was like a beautiful bird-of-Paradise sadly out of place in this cage of a rocky isolated island.

He watched with keen admiration the blushes that mantled that fair young face as they walked along.

"How love could light up those dark dreamy eyes," he thought, "and transfigure that beautiful face."

He could see that she was not more than sixteen, young and artless. The world, with its follies, its gayeties, its pleasures, its love, its passions, its tragedies was all unknown to her.

Osric Lawrence had offered a handsome fee to be rowed over to Rocky Point that morning. Now he changed his mind quite suddenly.

Could he stay at the island home a week, he was quite sure that the pure air would be beneficial to him, and the condition of his sprained arm greatly improved.

Abel Martin never once dreamed in his blind simplicity, what the attraction was that caused the handsome, debonair young stranger to linger at the old light-house.

"Of course we have no accommodations like you are accustomed to, but to such as it is your'e welcome," responded Abel, with a hearty whiff of smoke from his stumpy clay pipe.

So he stayed.

The week that followed was as sweet to Rose as the page of a romance. They wandered together over the white sands when the first rosy flush of the early sunlight crimsoned the golden waves like a sea of fire, and stood together looking out over the water when the white moon and the glowing stars changed the rippling waves to a silvery sheen. Ah, how much may happen in a week!

At first Osric Lawrence admired the piquant, beautiful face of Rose Hall. She was different from other girls in being simply indifferent to his homage. Then he learned to love her with a force and intensity that frightened even himself. Love came to Osric Lawrence like a fierce tornado that swayed his heart and soul as the whirlwind sways the trees. Older hearts are more careful in loving—to youth love's sweet dreams come quickly.

There was a certain reason—ay, and a grave one—why he should never have allowed himself to love Rose Hall.

He told himself, with impetuous recklessness, that—cost what it would, let his life be what it might in the past, let right or wrong rule, let the price be high or low—he would win her. There was nothing he would not have done to succeed. He would have hesitated at no crime, stopped at no wrong. With such a love there was little chance of escape for its object.

It was Osric's last day on the island. He was sitting with Rose on the moss-grown cliff.

“Shall you miss me when I am gone, Rose?” he asked. “I am going away to-night, and the keenest pain I have ever known will be—leaving you.”

The startled expression in the dark eyes raised to his answered him as no words could have done. A great wave of sorrow and desolation swept over her. After to-night it would be all over—this beautiful friendship, these happy hours, these sunny days that she had thought would have no ending. Her face grew white and her hands trembled. What would life be to her after he went away?

“Oh, Rose,” he cried, “I wish that I dare tell you something else! I feel like a man whose life is at stake; I long, yet fear, to speak. Have you read the beautiful story of ‘Romeo and Juliet’? how love came to Romeo, like the swift dart of an arrow, the first moment he looked upon the fair face of Juliet? He loved her as truly then as though he had known her for long years.”

"Yes, I have read the story," said Rose; and, looking into her face, he took heart of grace.

"Oh, Rose, promise me not to be angry with me for saying that which I am going to say to you! I ought not to say it; I know that. I ought to go away in silence, and let my secret eat my heart away. I know that is what I ought to do, but I can not. I must speak; the torture of suspense is killing me. It is this: What happened to Romeo has happened to me; my heart left me and went out to you. Oh, Rose, are you very angry?"

The girl's beautiful dark face flushed.

Rose looked up at him with dark, wondering eyes. Still she was not angry, and that was one point gained. If she would only listen to his pleadings, to all the love stories he knew so well how to tell, he felt sure that he would win her.

"Let me tell you this, Rose—I love you."

For a moment a dead silence fell between them. She did not know what to answer; she was pleased, delighted, flattered, but half afraid.

To have won a heart so completely, so entirely, so quickly was a grand thing to have done. It was like the romantic stories she had read of. She felt like a queen who has made a conquest; but it was at the same time very embarrassing. She did not in the least know what to do or say.

It was delightful, however, to have this little change in the monotonous life of which her gay, restless spirit had grown so weary.

"Oh, Rose, won't you tell me that my love has not been in vain? Tell me, do you care for me? Does

my going bring one pang to your heart? Shall you miss me?"

"Yes," responded Rose, slowly; "you know that I shall miss you, Mr. Lawrence."

His going was like the setting of the sun and the gloom of night to the flowers.

He caught the little hands in a very transport of joy.

"I believe you do care for me, Rose," he cried. "I am going to put it to the test. Grant me one favor, let me see you again."

"You can come to the island when you like," faltered Rose. "Uncle and I shall always be pleased to see you."

"It is only you whom I wish to see, Rose," he answered, impatiently; "you and you alone. I could not talk to you before your uncle. Meet me to-morrow night here, where we are parting now, just for one brief half hour, Rose, when the moon is shining. Only once and for the last time, perhaps," he pleaded. "I wonder how desperate the prayer of a dying man is. I should like to make mine the same. It is life or death to me. Will you come, Rose? Let me see you for just one half hour."

Her better sense said "No"; but he looked so handsome, so agitated, it was all so novel, so piquant and romantic.

"Perhaps I may come," she answered, timidly.

"Ah, Rose, you will come," he cried.

The next moment he had bent his handsome head and kissed her, and for long hours after he had gone that passionate kiss—the first that had ever been

pressed upon them by a lover—burned her scarlet lips.

That night when she crept up to her lonely room in the light-house she read the story of Romeo and Juliet again. Yes, her romance had been very much like Juliet's.

It was sweet to be wooed in such a fashion; it was very pleasant to listen to tender caressing words from a lover's lips; but whether she loved him with a love as deep as Juliet's for the handsome Romeo she could hardly tell.

The old light-house keeper was smoking his pipe on the doorstep when Rose emerged from the house the next evening, her straw hat hanging from her arm by its crimson ribbons.

"Where are you going, lass?" he asked, blowing the wreaths of blue smoke away from his bronzed face.

"Only a little way out on the beach, Uncle Abel," she answered a little confusedly, her bright eyes drooping beneath his gaze.

He watched the graceful figure flit away in the moonlight.

"Poor lass. She's lonesome without Lillian," he mused.

With swift feet she sped onward, and as she neared the rocks she saw that her lover was already there, impatiently pacing up and down the white beach.

At that moment he turned and saw her.

CHAPTER III.

"Rose!" he cried, starting forward in joyful eagerness and clasping her hands; "how good of you to come, my darling. I knew that I was asking the great-

est possible favor. I hardly dared hoped that you would grant it."

"I can stay but a few minutes," said Rose; "Uncle Abel will miss me shortly, Mr. Lawrence."

"Not Mr. Lawrence—I am Osric, always Osric to you hereafter, my sweet Rose, and you must call me by that name and no other!"

Together they sat down by the rippling silver sea, and to Rose's great surprise she saw tears shining in his eyes, and the light of the stars showed that his face was pale and haggard.

"I have so much to say to you, my darling, that I hardly know how to begin," he said at length. "On your 'yes' or 'no' to-night depends my whole future. My life, my well or evil-doing, all depend upon what you shall say to me to-night!"

She looked anxiously at him.

'What do you mean, Osric, I do not understand?'

He was silent for a moment, and she guessed rather than knew that some great struggle was going on in his mind.

"Rose!" he cried, "I am obliged to leave here suddenly; I ought to be far away from here now! but, oh, my love, it breaks my heart to leave you—I can not!"

"But you will come back soon?" said Rose faintly.

A curious whiteness overspread his handsome, haggard face; even his lips trembled beneath the golden mustache. He was looking at her with passionate wishful eyes.

"Rose," he said in a low, hoarse voice, "I could go away happy if my heart was at rest. You and you alone can set it at rest, dear; I would give my life

almost if you would grant the prayer I am about to make. You must not be startled when I tell you what it is!"

Rose laughed a gay rippling laugh to see how earnest he was, but the smile died from her lips at the white, pained face he turned toward her, she was awed by his emotion.

He drew nearer to her, pausing as though to collect his strength for a desperate effort.

"Rose," he said, "marry me; when I go from here let me feel sure that you are bound to me so firmly no one could take you from me; let me leave my wife behind me. It is my only salvation—my only hope"

But Rose drew back white and frightened.

"Marry you!" she repeated, with colorless cheeks; "oh, I can not, that would be quite impossible; I am frightened at the very word," and she wrung her little hands together.

"Rose!" he cried. "Mine is the prayer of a desperate man; let your own heart plead for me. Your eyes have told me you love me, even though your lips refused to utter the words. Marry me, my darling, to-night, this very hour. Then I can go away content, knowing that you are mine; I would die sooner than lose you; and a deadly fear presses strong at my heart that unless I bound you to me by the strongest of ties you would be lost to me."

"Oh, I can not, I can not!" said the girl. "Osric, you must not ask me; Lillian and Aunt Hulda would be so grieved."

But love has an eloquence all its own. He was young and handsome, he was passionately in love with her, there was no argument possible that he did not use.

Then a strange idea occurred to her what a glorious revenge it would be upon her Aunt Hulda for leaving her upon the lonely island—to come home and find her married to a young husband who loved her so well, and who was as handsome as a prince.

Rose's eyes sparkled with amusement. It would, indeed, be a glorious revenge upon her aunt. The seriousness and solemnity of marriage never once entered her pretty head.

“Rose,” he cried, “you are so silent that I begin to fear. If you say ‘No,’ I might as well fling myself from these rocks into the sea, for I can not lose you and live.”

His passionate words alarmed her. Ah, how much he must love her to go down to death if he lost her. That was indeed love.

“Choose, my beautiful Rose,” he cried; “will you marry me, or will you send me to ruin and death?”

“I will marry you, Osric,” she said, softly, and she never forgot the ecstasy that broke over his face and shone in his eyes.

How he thanked her, how he praised and blessed her.

But even as he spoke he knew that it was the cruelest thing he could do, to link her fair young life with his own dark checkered one; but he loved the girl so desperately that he was willing to brave fate itself for her sake.

His boat was near at hand. He lifted the slight, trembling figure into it, and with a few powerful strokes of his muscular arm it shot over the water like a swift-winged bird, making straight for the little village whose lights gleamed afar out over the water;

and beautiful Rose Hall went on to her doom with flushed face and beating heart.

There was a little stone church, covered with ivy, in the very heart of the village of Wilton, presided over by an aged white-haired rector; thither they bent their steps.

The old gray church with its dim shadows, seemed to fill the girl with terror, as she knelt down before the altar with Osric. The wind seemed to sob outside, and the leaves of the trees that tossed against the window pane seemed a lost spirit in distress. To Rose it seemed a strange, wierd dream.

The minister looked in wonder at the pair before him. The girl so young and so exquisitely lovely, the man so handsome, but ill at ease.

It was not until after she had uttered the words that bound her for life to him who stood beside her, that she realized what she had done. She never knew how, or why, but when the wedding-ring was placed on her finger, and she realized that she was Osric's bride, a deadly chill came over her.

"Your wedding-ring is one of the costliest diamonds money could buy, love," she heard him whisper, "but when you reach the island, you must take it from your finger and wear it attached to your neck by a golden chain; no human eye must rest upon it, remember my words, Rose, no eye save yours must see it."

Together they went into the vestry and signed their names in the register. It was strange that at that moment Rose should remember that it was the eighty-seventh page on which they had written.

An hour later they had reached the island again,

and Osric was clasping her in his arms bidding her farewell with burning tears in his eyes that fell upon her face.

"Oh, Rose," he cried, "teach me to say good-bye. If I stay much longer I will not be able to tear myself away. You shall never regret what you have done to-night, Rose."

He took one of the roses she wore in her dark curls, kissed it tenderly, placing it carefully in his breast pocket.

"Now I shall go away without the haunting dread that I might lose you. Promise me that you will remain here on this island until I shall come to claim you. Promise that you will watch and wait for me on this spot where we part," he whispered.

"I promise," she said, slowly. "I shall be here unless the sea-gulls carry me away, and there is no danger of that."

"Oh, Rose, my lovely Rose! how can I leave you!" he cried. "I must go, yet my living, beating heart is here with you."

He took her in his arms, his face white with agitation, kissing her beautiful white hands, her lovely face and dark, curling hair, murmuring that death itself were easier to bear than part with her. It was breaking his heart.

And in that moment, while his kisses were upon her lips, the horrible thought swept over her heart that she did not love him. With the changing of the hour she had repented bitterly that she had been persuaded into marrying him.

Young as she was she realized dimly that it was a

strange, foolish, mad marriage, yet it was legal and binding; she was Osric's bride.

As she walked back to the old light-house she would have thought it all a dream had it not been for the sparkling diamond that glowed upon her finger.

Abel Martin still sat on the doorstep smoking his pipe in the moonlight.

"You've been out on the beach a long time, lass," he said. "I was just going out in search of ye. I thought mayhap you had fallen asleep and some great wave had carried you out to sea."

He wondered why beautiful Rose threw her white arms round his neck, begging with tears in her lovely eyes that he would pardon her for what she had done.

"I reckon I'll have to, providin' you don't stay out so late again, lass," he answered.

And beautiful, guilty Rose crept up to her room with the story of her romantic secret marriage a heavy weight in her heart.

Two days later, Hulda Martin and Lillian returned. They had expected that willful Rose would meet them with an outburst of passion and angry resentment for being left behind.

Lillian was amazed when her lovely sister threw herself in her arms weeping as if her heart would break refusing to be comforted. It was so unlike beautiful, daring, willful Rose.

She would not tell them what had happened, she decided; at least, not just yet.

"Poor Rose," cried Lillian. "Ten days of such wretched loneliness has broken my poor darling's tender heart."

Ah, had they but known that those days were the

sweetest, yet bore the most accursed fruit, that Rose Hall was ever to know.

Then came out the startling revelation as to what took Hulda Martin to Rocky Point on that eventful day she had received the mysterious letter.

“It is a pitiful romance, Rose,” cried Hulda Martin, sobbingly. “Your mother was my sister. She was young and fair, like Lillian, when a handsome youth wooed and won her. She married Robert Hall, your father, and I was well pleased; but, oh, Rose, I could never picture to you the anger of Robert’s lady mother. She cut him off without a dollar though she was rolling in gold, and she never forgave her son for marrying beneath him as she called it, never.

“And when Robert and his wife both died, leaving you and Lillian, and I appealed to her for aid, she wrote me curtly that my sister’s children might beg or starve for all she cared. Imagine my indignation when I received a command from her after all these years to bring you both to Rocky Point, as she would be there a week. If she liked your appearance she would take you both to her grand home; but the condition was that you were never to breathe your young mother’s name within her walls—you were to cut loose from all that you had loved and known in the past.

“Oh, Rose, it was a great struggle; I took Lillian to see the proud, cold woman; ‘I love my mother’s memory!’ cried Lillian, ‘you helped to break her heart; I would sooner die than go with you, though your home be a palace.’

“‘So be it!’ cried the grim woman; ‘you have your

mother's face, you do not please me any how; yet stay: why did not your sister come with you?"

"My sister is loyal to our mother's memory, she would think and act as I do," answered Lillian proudly.

"Did I not answer as you would have had me, Rose?" asked her sister anxiously.

"Yes," responded Rose; "you and I will live and die here on this island home together, with Aunt Hulda and Uncle Abel, who have been so kind to us, before we would enter that marble mansion whose doors were closed against our poor young mother!"

"Rightly spoken!" cried the old light-house keeper heartily; they had feared restless Rose would be dazzled by wealth, they loved her all the better because she was loyal.

"How did you like your visit to Rocky Point, Lilly, dear?" asked Rose, when the two sisters found themselves alone that sunny afternoon.

Lillian's face clouded.

"A pitiful event happened at the wharf just as we were coming away which quite saddened me. It was the arrest of a young and handsome man; I had read an account of what he had done in the paper the day before. The paper contained his picture; I brought it home to show it to you; he was so young and handsome to be charged with so grave a crime; taking money and diamonds from a jewelry firm with whom he was connected!

"Looking at his face one could hardly have believed him guilty. It seems that he made his escape on an outgoing steamer, which sunk on the night of the terrible storm; he was among the missing, and they be-

lieved him to be drowned, when suddenly he made his appearance at Rocky Point.

“Every one said he should have made good his escape while every one believed him dead; why he should have remained around here is a mystery; he must have been mad. He could have escaped so easily days ago.

“Tears sprang to my eyes when I heard him plead with them to let him go free and he would give back every dollar and every diamond save one that was lost; but he would make the loss of that one good; oh, how he prayed and pleaded on his knees with them. But they took him away in handcuffs; and my heart bled for him, he was so young, so handsome! There was one thing he did that touched every one: he took a faded red rose from his breast pocket, murmuring ‘Oh, rose,’ what else he said one could not distinguish.”

“You have forgotten to show me his picture and tell me his name,” said Rose; and she was startled at her own voice.

A moment later Lillian had brought the paper and laid it in her lap. One glance at that pictured face so handsome and debonair in its fair beauty, and the light seemed to fade from the sun and the world to stand still; the heart of her bosom seemed to break with one quick throb; her face grew ghastly as death. It was a wonder the terrible blow did not strike her dead then and there; the name beneath the pictured face read—Osric Lawrence.

CHAPTER IV.

No cry came from Rose's white lips as she read the fatal paragraph in the paper Lillian had brought her.

The lovely face grew white as marble. With a great gasping moan she threw up her hands and fell face downward upon the white sand, but the great boon of unconsciousness did not come to her. Heaven help her! This was the man she had secretly married.

In a moment Lillian was beside her with a frightened dismayed face.

"Oh, Rose," she cried, distressedly, "if I had known that the story of handsome Osric Lawrence would affect you so, I should never have brought the paper home to you."

Lillian cried out in alarm at the ghastly face that was turned toward her.

"We will forget it, Rose," she cried. "The story of a criminal has but little interest for us."

"Heaven help me," wailed Rose, below her breath, "if she but knew what he is to me. Oh, fatal hour when first we met. Oh, fatal hour when he persuaded me into linking my fate with his!"

Now she knew why he had been obliged to leave so suddenly. He dared not linger. And to think that she was this man's bride. That she had stood at the altar with him promising to love and obey him. Oh, cruel fate! Oh, cruel destiny!

Now she knew why such a chill had oppressed her when he had taken her in his arms, calling her his own beautiful Rose, how she had shrunk from his caresses.

And this man, fleeing from justice, was the man she had married. A hot flush of indignation and bitter despair burned her face. Surely the worst crime he had

committed was deceiving and duping her into linking her life with his.

Oh, if she could blot out the events of the last week! What would she do if Osric Lawrence were set free and came to claim her? She could imagine her Aunt Hulda's dismay, and Lillian's horror if the story of her marriage were made known to them.

"I should kill myself," she moaned, with clinched hands. "I could not face the exposure and the shame."

Oh, how glad she was that she had not told them of the young husband who was as handsome as a prince who was coming to claim her. Now the dread truth should never be revealed.

What if her uncle should tell them when they spoke of this matter, read the paper to him, showing him the pictured face which they assuredly would do, what if her uncle should cry out: "This is the same man Rose saved from the hungry sea on the night of the wreck; he stayed here at the light-house with us a week."

If they should question her about it she would go mad.

Lillian was speaking to her, but she had not even heard her voice. Gently Lillian took the paper from her clinched, cold hand and threw it out into the sea.

"We will neither think nor talk about this cruel story, Rose," she said, "It has made you quite ill."

Together the sisters walked slowly over the white sands to the light-house. Rose's heart almost stood still as she heard her uncle relating the story of that night of the storm and of her great bravery; but he quite forgot to mention the name of the man she had rescued, or that he was young and handsome, and had lingered at the island a week.

That night, while Lillian lay sleeping, Rose crept from the white bed which they shared together and stood at the window looking out over the moonlit sea.

"Oh, if I could but die!" sobbed the girl.

Cautiously she had opened the window and tossed the glittering diamond far out into the waves. Since early morning it had seemed to burn and scorch the white bosom upon which it lay.

Should she follow the glittering ring down into the sea? Osric Lawrence could not claim her then. She realized with a terrible shock that when he came for her she would be obliged to go with him; he could compel her to go with him, and she would sooner die.

Suddenly she remembered his constant foreboding that he should lose her. What if it should be verified in some strange way, after all?

If she could but escape him, go away out of his life and never see him again! The idea came to her with the force of an electric shock. If she could, and she raised her eyes to Heaven with a great, tearless sob.

She remembered that he had said he would die or go mad if he were to lose her: and she, Heaven help her, she would die or go mad if he were to find her.

Oh, if she had but dared make a confidante of Lillian! Would Lillian help her keep her horrible secret or would she turn from her in horror at what she had done?

Oh, if she could but fly from him, hide where he could never find her though he searched the world over for her!

"Could it really be so very wrong?" she asked herself. "Must she suffer all her life for a few words so thoughtlessly spoken in the old church?—words she

hardly understood the meaning of. She would never have been duped into promising to reverence, honor, and obey this man if she had known that he was a criminal fleeing from justice."

There were moments when her heart almost softened toward handsome Osric Lawrence, when she remembered how madly he loved her, that it was for the sake of lingering beside her he had stayed when he should have been far away.

But the next moment anger and pride rose up in fierce resentment in her heart when she remembered that in the cruel selfishness of his love he had not spared her—coupled her name to one that was blackened with disgrace and dishonor.

Oh, if she could but fly from him, where he could never find her.

Suddenly a great cry broke from her lips. Ah, why had she never thought of it before. She could go to the cold, haughty woman whose aid Lillian had so proudly declined. In that dazzling mansion home in the far-off city he would never think of looking for the girl he had left on the lonely isolated island with a marriage-ring on her finger.

The thought seemed to come to her like an inspiration. The conditions were cruel enough if she went to the cold, proud woman who hated her poor young mother's very memory, she must give up her Aunt Hulda, her Uncle Abel and Lillian. She must never speak their names, never look upon their faces, never write or receive a line from them. Yet it were better a thousand times to do this than to remain here waiting in horrible dread, each day and hour praying that she might die ere Osric Lawrence came to claim her. Let

them think her treacherous if they would; they did not know what influenced her, oh, they did not know!

There was great consternation at the light-house the next morning when Rose made known her decision, that she would accept the home her grandmother offered her.

With a bitter cry Hulda Martin turned to her. She did not dare look into the blue eyes of Lillian, lest her courage should forsake her.

"Speak the words again, that I may know that I have heard aright!" she cried. "Let me realize that you, for whom I have almost given my life—you whom I have watched and tended with such care from the moment your dying mother put you into my arms—you are going to leave me for a stranger who hates our name and race—you are going to a home where even your mother's name dare not be spoken—willing to go away from those who have loved you so!"

Hulda's grief was pitiful to behold. Lillian's arms crept round the neck of the woman who had been more than a mother to them.

"I will never leave you, Aunt Hulda," she whispered. "If Rose goes she will soon come back to us again."

It was a sharp sword in Hulda Martin's heart to see the one she had loved the least cling to her in this hour, and the one she had loved best turn from her.

In vain Lillian pleaded with Rose; she was not to be moved from her purpose. Abel Martin bowed his head on his breast, and the mute reproach was more touching than words would have been.

Hulda Martin raised Lillian from her knees where she had been pleading with Rose.

"Say no more," she cried. "This stranger's gold has

turned her heart against us. She is going to the cold, haughty woman who broke the heart of her mother before her; let her have a care lest she will break hers."

"We must part sooner or later in life," said Rose, with white, stiff lips; "it is best that I should go now."

"Listen to me," cried Hulda Martin. "If you leave us now, Rose, you shall never—so help me Heaven—look upon my face again. You make your choice, and you must abide by it—nothing can ever alter it in this world! We shall all leave the light-house and go so far away that you shall never see us more! I predict that, in the life of luxury and gayety you are going to, the time will come when you will need a true friend—when you will look back with unutterable regret to this hour, when you cast off the love of uncle, aunt and loving sister for the trappings of wealth. The time will come when the anger of Heaven will fall upon you for it!"

"Let them think that of me, if they will," Rose told herself. "Better that, than they should know the true reason. Oh, if Lillian would but come with me!" said she, holding out her hands in pitiful entreaty.

"I shall never cross the threshold of the home that would not receive my poor dead mother," said Lillian, with dignity.

Without another word Rose turned and fled from the light-house, the bitter thought rankling in her heart.

Better this than that Osric Lawrence should return, and, finding her there, compel her to go with him. What would death be compared to that?

CHAPTER V.

It was a warm afternoon in June; the sun shone brightly upon the gay throngs that promenaded the

thoroughfares of New York, upon the stately brown-stone mansions of the aristocratic avenues, and upon the face of a young girl eagerly scanning the numbers of the houses she passed, stopping hesitatingly at length, before the most imposing structure upon the avenue.

The filmy lace curtains with their background of amber satin were carefully drawn as if to exclude the sun's rays. An air of gloom pervaded the exterior, from the straight windows of plate glass looking out of their brown-stone settings, to the fierce bronze lions that guarded imposingly either side of the marble steps that led to the massive carved oaken doors.

The mistress of this elegant mansion—Mrs. Margaret Hall—a tall, stately woman of sixty, robed in heavy black trailing satin, with diamonds blazing like stars upon her hands which lay crossed in her lap, sat alone in her *boudoir*, alone with her parrot and lap dog. Her heavy black brows met in a frown that seemed habitual upon that grim, proud face. She rose from the cushioned arm-chair in which she had been seated and with a firm step crossed the room to her writing-desk, and, throwing back the lid, drew from it a letter written in a bold, handsome masculine hand, which she perused for the twentieth time that morning.

"I will read again what Royal has to say," she mused.

Before she could draw it from its envelope, there was a peal of the door bell, and a moment later one of the servants appeared at the open door.

"If you please, ma'am," he began hurriedly, "there's a young girl down at the door who insists upon seeing

you. I told her you wasn't at home to anybody, but she——”

“Ah, ha, ha! You old rascal, you knew better!” shrieked a shrill voice from the other side of the room.

“Proceed, Douglass,” said the lady calmly, the frown deepening on her face, “what did the girl want?”

—“I beg your pardon,” exclaimed a sweet, hesitating young voice, “please allow me to explain in person. I must see you, madam, and alone.”

The grand old lady turned sharply around, and saw, standing before her on the threshold the loveliest vision of timid girlhood she had ever beheld.

She motioned the servant to leave the room.

“Now,” she said, turning to the young girl, “who are you, and what do you want?”

The measured words, the freezing tone, the cold gleam of the eyes, the frowning stern face would have intimidated most young girls; but the haughty demeanor of this cold proud woman did not daunt the young girl before her.

She glided quickly forward and knelt at the grand old lady's feet.

“I have but just heard of your kind offer to my sister Lillian and me—to come to you and share your home—and love you, grandma. Lillian chooses to stay, but I have come to you. I am Rose—Rose Hall,” she said: “won't you say I am welcome, grandma?”

The next moment two arms were wreathed round her neck and fresh, warm, loving rosy lips were laid upon the cold ones that had not known a caress for long years.

Mrs. Hall looked into that dark, glowing, beautiful face so like the one she had idolized in the bitter past.

The fair-haired sister whom they called Lillian, was like the young mother who had taken from her all that made life worth living for ; but this one—Rose—had the dark, glowing beauty of the Halls ; she could have loved her for that if for nothing else.

“Welcome to my heart and home, Rose,” replied Mrs. Hall, with stately grace, “and as long as you conform to the conditions of my offer I shall love you. From the moment you cross this threshold you leave the old life behind you, together with all its associations. Never refer to it. My niece is stopping with me.” pursued the lady. “I hope you will be friends,” she touched the bell as she spoke. “Douglass,” she said, “tell Miss Derwent I wish her here at once.”

A moment later a tall young girl entered the room:

“Celia,” said Mrs. Hall, “this is my granddaughter, Rose—Rose Hall.”

Celia Derwent glided forward, and touched her cold lips to Rose’s cheek, murmuring a few inarticulate words of greeting.

For an instant the blue eyes and black ones met, then Celia conducts her to the pretty little *boudoir* just off her own, which is to be set apart for Rose’s use.

Gayly the girls chat together as they go up the broad stairway, and the smile does not leave Celia’s lips till she finds herself quite alone, and then the stormy face of the blonde beauty is terrible to behold.

Celia Derwent is young in years, not over eighteen, but the ways of the world have made her *intriguing* and *mercenary*.

She had been cast about on the waves of poverty, until her Aunt Margaret Hall rescued her and installed her in her elegant home, and the one grand dream of

her life had been that she will one day inherit her aunt's magnificent fortune; and now, with the appearance of Rose Hall, she sees her golden dreams vanish like mist before the sun, and the girl would rather die than go back to the poverty from which her aunt rescued her.

There is another reason, too, why sudden terror struck to her heart as she gazed upon the beautiful face of Rose Hall.

What would Royal Montague think of her when he saw her? admire her he must, but would he learn to love her?

Celia Derwent turned white to the lips as she pondered the question over in her own mind.

In her own room, with the door securely fastened to bar out all intruders, Rose lay face downward among the pale lilies of the velvet carpet, sobbing her very heart out in passionate tears.

Oh, why had Heaven not given her this beautiful home long years ago? then, she would never have met the man who had cursed her bright young life, the fatal chains that bound her to him would never have been forged.

What would her haughty grandmother say if she knew her story? What would the fair-haired girl whom they had called Celia, say?

"They shall never know," cried Rose, springing to her feet with passionate energy, born of reckless despair.

She bathed the tear-stained face, and smoothed out the tangled black curls, and as she descended to the dining-room, even Celia Derwent, looking at her with jealous eyes, could not help but acknowledge that, if

she were dressed as other girls, there would not be a handsomer girl in New York than Rose Hall.

Her proud, ambitious old grandmother was delighted with her. How brilliant the girl would be in society. She would marry well.

Rose's gay, dashing, piquant manner pleased her well. She never dreamed that one half of the girl's nights were spent in the bitterest of tears, that she had thrown herself into the vortex of fashionable life to cheat an aching heart into forgetfulness, to blot out, if she could, that terrible week.

There was one thing Mrs. Hall could not comprehend: Rose could never be induced to wear a diamond. Other young girls coveted them, Rose abhorred them.

Her discovery of Rose's antipathy to them came about in a singular manner. Mrs. Hall had taken her to one of the fashionable jewelry stores on Broadway to purchase a pair of bracelets. One of the pair which suited her best contained a superb white diamond deeply imbedded in its yellow depths, the other, its mate, was severely plain.

"I suppose this stone could be matched?" said Mrs. Hall, turning the ornament over in her hands.

"I have nothing in stock just like it at present," returned the jeweler. "The mate to it, a peculiarly large and brilliant stone, is the one my partner pretended to have lost when he absconded some few weeks since."

"Ah, how did that unfortunate affair of yours turn out?" asked Mrs. Hall. "There was something of it in the papers a few days since, but I did not read the final result of the trial. Of course the young man was guilty, yet I could not help feeling sorry for Osric Lawrence."

Rose had been standing by her side gazing indifferently enough at the glittering contents of the showcase; but now the listless indifference fled; strained, painful attention took its place. By the greatest effort she restrained the gasping cry that sprung from her white lips. She clinched her little hands so tightly together that the tender skin was bruised; but she did not even feel the pain of it so great was her anxiety to hear the words that fell from the jeweler's lips.

Like the shock of doom she heard his answer.

"He was sent up for three years, madam. True, he made restitution of all the money; but as to the gems, the most valuable one, a very large diamond which was set in a ring, he declared he had lost. We did not believe it. As he had not the wherewith to pay for it he was sent up for three years to repent for having disposed of it. The stone was valued at two thousand dollars."

Rose's heart gave one terrible throb as he finished speaking—then seemed to stand still. Her strength seemed leaving her, her limbs trembled.

How little they dreamed that the young girl listening so closely to each word that fell from their lips could have revealed to them the whereabouts of the diamond, that it had been put upon her finger as a marriage-ring and she had afterward flung it into the sea.

How strange it was that in the last fatal moment Osric Lawrence had spared her. He could so easily have sent them to her island home and claimed it.

She did not know that the one prayer of his heart night and day had been that the bride he had won should never know the story of his folly, for the day

would come when he should claim her. Love for beautiful, peerless Rose had sealed his lips in silence.

CHAPTER VI.

Like one in a horrible dream Rose listens. She is sorry for the terrible fate that overtook Osric Lawrence, still, it is wonderful—a merciful relief to her that for three long years she will be quite safe from his persecutions.

“I will enjoy my life while I may,” she told herself. “I will be happy while I can!”

Rose’s greatest trial was being separated from Lillian. Regularly she sent her Aunt Hulda all the pocket money that was allowed her, together with pitiful letters pleading for forgiveness; all this was done secretly. Yet, alas! her letters were always returned unopened; with the words across the back:

“You are as one dead to us!”

The money was returned untouched.

If it had not been for this estrangement, Rose would have been happy; for the heart of youth does not long brood over sorrow; but gives itself up to the pleasures of the present.

Suitors surrounded her; but it seemed that peerless Rose Hall was hard to please; she sent them away one after the other. Mrs. Hall looked on but made no comment; she was a far-seeing, shrewd woman; she had studied Rose’s nature well, and was not at all surprised to find that it contained a spice of that charming quality called “contradiction.” She formed her own secret plans as to whom she wished Rose to marry; but she knew if she mentioned this fact to her together with the announcement that in reply to her pressing invita-

tion to Royal Montague to visit them, he had answered he would be in New York by the last of June at latest, that Rose would be prepared to dislike him heartily and rebel.

She set about paving the way for his coming in a manner which was certainly unique.

"Rose shall see Royal Montague first, then we shall see what follows," she thought with a smile.

On the afternoon of the day she formed this resolution, she put it into practice. Rose had come into her *boudoir* with a bouquet of freshly gathered flowers; she found her grandmother deeply engrossed in the pages of a letter.

"Rose," she said, returning it to its envelope, "lay this in my writing-desk and bring me the card-case that is in the right-hand corner."

Rose crossed the room with a light step and a smile upon her lips. How was she to know that the card-case she was sent in search of had been purposely laid side by side with a superb portrait of a young and handsome man.

She stood gazing at the pictured face that smiled up at her from the depths of the writing-desk, like one fascinated, quite forgetting her errand.

Mrs. Hall turned around sharply, and with quite a show of impatience.

"What are you looking at, Rose? what are you doing?" the girl's face flushed, she gave a guilty start.

"Whose picture is this, grandma?" she asked in a low voice, holding the portrait up to view.

Mrs. Hall looked at it with an expression of great annoyance, though her heart beat fast at the success of her stratagem.

"You must not touch that, Rose, indeed you should not have looked at it; dear me, how careless I was to send you to that desk at all. I quite forgot about that picture being there."

"But now that I *have* seen it, won't you tell me who it is?" persisted Rose, eagerly.

"I would rather not!" declared Mrs. Hall; "it is no one whom you have ever seen or ever will see if I can prevent it!"

"You have aroused my curiosity, grandma," said Rose. "Tell me why you don't wish me to see or know the original of this portrait? I'm sure he looks like a very clever young man."

Mrs. Hall frowned.

"I am sorry that you have seen Royal Montague's picture, Rose. I prefer not to speak about him. Put the portrait where you found it," she said, affecting great annoyance, while she was at heart severely delighted.

But instead of obeying her, Rose carried it to the window and gazed at it with admiring eyes. The dark-blue eyes seemed to smile up at her, and the mustached lips almost seemed to say: "It would be a great pleasure to know you."

The face upon which she gazed seemed to magnetize her; her heart throbbed strangely. Why should the pictured face of a man whom she had never seen have power to move her so? She remembered her grandmother had called him Royal Montague.

"Rose, do you hear me, put that picture away," said Mrs. Hall, in a sharp angry voice.

Yet she could scarcely refrain from laughing outright to see how well her ruse worked.

"If I had said: 'Rose, here is a picture of the one man above all others whom I wish you to admire,' the girl would have seen a thousand faults in him," she thought, amusedly, "but forbidding her to look at it, gives it a piquant zest."

"Put the picture away, Rose, and forget it," she said, slowly.

"I wish you would tell me why," pouted Rose.

"Perhaps it would be as well to put you on your guard," replied Mrs. Hall, slowly, knowing well the *penchant* young people have for craving that which they have been warned and guarded against. "I will tell you why, Rose," she went on, hesitatingly: "to look long at the handsome face would be to admire it too deeply, and handsome Royal Montague is not for you; to admire him would be quite in vain, he is almost as good as engaged, I believe."

Rose could not tell why, but the words fell like a chill upon her heart.

"I am not quite sure that he really is engaged; he is very fastidious in his tastes, and hard to please; a young girl would have to be more than ordinarily beautiful to win him, and highly accomplished. We will speak no more about him, Rose; put the picture away and bring me my card-case."

This time Rose obeyed.

Yet all that day she thought of the pictured face; the gaze of the blue laughing eyes haunted her. Ah, why had fate given such a noble lover to some fortunate girl, while to her—a startled cry broke from her lips. What though he were a king among men, and she could have won his love, of what avail would it be? it was madness wasting one thought about him. Yet that night when

she found herself alone in Mrs. Hall's *boudoir* she stole another glance at the portrait in the writing-desk.

Ah, how handsome he was. If she had met such a one before the terrible blight fell upon her life could she have loved him? The answer in her throbbing heart was "Yes."

Two weeks later, Mrs. Hall with her niece, Celia Derwent, and Rose, had taken up their abode at Linden Villa, as their summer residence at Peekskill on the Hudson was called; and to open the festivities of the season Mrs. Hall had decided to give a lawn-tennis party. Charades were to be given in the evening, and it was to end in a grand ball.

Celia Derwent was delighted with the prospect; Rose was rather indifferent.

"What shall you wear?" cried Celia when the two girls were alone in their rooms examining the boxes of finery Mrs. Hall had ordered from New York for them for this occasion.

"White, I suppose," answered Rose.

Celia Derwent shook back her blonde braids impatiently.

"I ought to wear white, and you ought to dress in contrast, Rose," she declared.

"Why, what can it matter? What difference can it make?" questioned Rose.

"We ought to make a sensation. The most eligible young men in the country will be here. You and I are spoken of as the red and white roses. We ought to dress accordingly. I ought to dress in something light with rosebuds in my hair and at my belt; you ought to wear this overdress of crimson lace with crimson roses in your hair."

"It will not matter much what I wear, I dare say," Rose commented. "If the people we meet here are like those at the grand balls in New York I shall think them very tiresome. I am heartily tired of balls, dancing, compliments and flattery."

"Wait till you see the handsome young gentlemen hereabouts. Many of them belong to the regiment which is camping here. Quite a number of them will be present. Oh, Rose, they look delightfully grand in their military uniforms. One of them in particular is quite a favorite of Aunt Margaret's. I suppose she has spoken to you of him, his name is Royal Montague?"

As she asked the question she looked anxiously into Rose's eyes. Rose blushed but did not reply.

"I have never met him," pursued Celia, but she did not add that since she had first heard of handsome Royal Montague, the New York banker's son and heir, and saw his portrait, the one hope of her life had been to capture him and his prospective wealth when they should meet.

The sun never shone upon a gayer party than that gathered together at Linden Villa that bright afternoon. Pretty, laughing girls and debonair cavaliers in their glistening uniforms and dress coats.

The party was at its height when Royal Montague made his appearance, and by Celia's skillful maneuvering she succeeded in being introduced to him first.

"I shall have a chance of making quite an impression upon him before he sees Rose, and the impression shall be a deep and lasting one," she promised herself.

Celia was very coquettish. She knew she was look-

ing her best and she put forth all her witchery to fascinate him. He certainly seemed to admire her.

He had lingered by her side an hour or more promenading the lawn. She was quite careful, however, to keep him out of Rose's way.

The old saying, "that when nature makes a man handsome she takes away a good portion of his brains as an offset," was not exemplified in the case of Royal Montague. He was neither a coxcomb nor a dandy; he never indulged in idle compliments, he never talked of love; but there was a gallantry and deference in his manner which charmed every woman with whom he came in contact.

They had been seated on a rustic bench beneath one of the linden-trees when suddenly Royal Montague turned to Celia with sudden animation in his face.

"Look! what a pretty picture, Miss Derwent!" he cried. "Who is that young girl standing beside the fountain with the crimson roses in her hair?"

She looked up with sudden misgiving and saw that he was attentively watching Rose. A cold chill swept over her heart and her face paled, and a dangerous light glittered in her pale-blue eyes.

"Who is that young girl?" he repeated.

She would have given much not to have answered that question; but she was compelled to speak for he was looking into her face with eager inquiry.

"That is Rose Hall, the granddaughter of your hostess," she said, trying to speak calmly and carelessly. "We are both her *protégées*."

"Will you present me to Miss Hall?" he asked, suddenly.

She would have given the world to have been able to

have refused him, but she dared not; so side by side they walked over to where Rose stood, and glancing up at the stranger, the handsomest young man she had ever beheld, Rose Hall stood face to face with her fate; then the real tragedy of her life began.

CHAPTER VII.

Rose Hall was standing alone by the fountain when she saw Celia Derwent and the handsome stranger approaching her.

She saw that Celia was all smiles and apparent amiability, and she guessed that her companion must be one of her list of "eligibles." As he advanced still nearer, she recognized him at once as the original of the portrait she had seen in the writing-desk.

Celia introduced Royal Montague to Rose, closely watching the result. He bowed low before her, and there was no mistaking the admiration in his eyes as they rested upon the beautiful, girlish face before him; but he talked to Rose in much the same fashion as he had talked to Celia.

Celia had no intention of leaving them alone together, but fate willed differently, and she was obliged to go, Mrs. Hall having sent for her. There was a smile on her lips as she excused herself, but in her heart there was bitter rage.

"Would you like to walk as far as the river?" asked Royal.

Rose assented, and together they made the tour of the lawn that sloped down to the banks of the stream.

He talked to her gayly enough; he was always charming and vivacious; he had the gift of knowing exactly what to say and how to say it.

Royal Montague was pleased with Rose's simple, girlish manner. She did not make the mistake that many young girls make—that of trying to attract him.

He did most of the talking, Rose did the listening.

From the first moment Rose had looked into Royal Montague's eyes, the whole world seemed to change for her. The gaze of those laughing eyes awoke something in the girl's heart that was never to sleep again.

He saw the beautiful dark eyes droop under his gaze, and the lovely cheeks flush scarlet; but he never dreamed that Rose Hall had found in him her ideal—found it suddenly and without warning; she herself did not realize it then.

He was the one man in all the world whom she could have loved with all the warm, passionate depths of her heart; but alas! he had crossed her path too late.

Half an hour passed—they were still talking by the river; to Rose it seemed but a blissful moment. She could have stood forever by the swift-flowing river, looking into Royal Montague's handsome face and listening to him.

Mrs. Hall watched them from the portico and smiled. She wondered how long they would stand there, if she did not go and remind Rose that there were other guests anxious to be presented to her.

"It certainly looks very much like a case of love at first sight with both of them," she thought, as she walked over to where they stood.

To Rose her appearance was like the breaking up of a beautiful dream.

"I am sorry to have monopolized so much of Miss Hall's time. I apologize and beg a thousand pardons," said Royal, laughingly. "I shall not be so remiss again.

I am going to stay for the ball," he went on. "May I ask in advance for the first waltz with you, Miss Rose?" he said, eagerly.

Rose blushed and assented, and as she raised those dark, splendid eyes of hers to his, he read in them something that he had never seen in any woman's eyes before.

It was admiration that thrilled Royal Montague's heart as his eyes followed the slender, girlish form as she left him; but in the heart of Rose Hall love was awakened. She went among her guests with smiling lips, flushed cheeks, and shining eyes. Men who had found her cold and proud before, took heart of grace at the change in her demeanor toward them and were highly elated. How were they to know that she scarcely heard a word they said to her, and that, when she smiled, and her lovely face flushed, it was not their words that caused it—she was thinking of a handsome face and a pair of laughing, sunny, blue eyes.

The day passed as the days always do, whether they be shortened by happiness or lengthened by sorrow.

But Rose Hall kept no count of the hours; all that was taking place seemed like a dream to her; the only effort that she could make was an attempt to prevent other people from guessing her secret.

The evening which ended in the grand ball was even more delightful than the day had been.

Royal sought her at once when the music of the beautiful, dreamy "Bluebells of Scotland" waltz struck up.

"You are very kind not to have forgotten a promise made so far in advance," he said, laughingly.

Then came to Rose a dream of music, of light, of perfume, a handsome face looking down into her own, a

strong arm clasping her, a vision of happiness and delight; and there was no one to whisper to her—no angel to warn her that the path which looked so pleasant led to a chasm of darkness and despair.

A woman of more maturity might have realized her danger—might have seen the rock ahead in her future—might have been strong enough to reason with herself, knowing the past; but it could not be expected that Rose—pretty, hapless Rose, who was scarcely more than sixteen—knew how to battle with life, with love, and with fate.

The dark past seemed but a horrible dream to her. She remembered only that three years of respite had been given her, and that she had promised herself she should enjoy them.

Youthful hearts never dream that they are being drawn into the meshes of love until the spell is over them.

Rose did not realize that it was wrong to give herself up so entirely to the pleasure of Royal Montague's society—to treasure up his words and his looks when he was away from her—to feel her pulses thrill when she saw him coming toward her—to feel keen regret when he bade her good-bye.

"Have you enjoyed the day and the evening, Rose?" asked Celia Derwent, when the two girls were alone in their room that night.

"Enjoy it?" cried Rose, turning her dark, curly head away on the lace pillow to hide her blushes—"more than I can tell you, Celia; it has been the happiest day of my life."

Celia bit her lips and gave the curl papers she was

twisting up such a wrench that she nearly cried out with the pain of it.

"I think I can guess why you enjoyed it so much," she said, in a low, strained voice. "A certain person made it very pleasant for you."

"Every one made it pleasant for me," replied Rose.

Celia sat down upon the edge of the low couch, and drew Rose's hands away from her face.

"There is one question I should like to ask you, Rose," she said: "How do you like Royal Montague?"

"I do not see how any one could help admiring him. I have never met a more perfect gentleman," admitted Rose. "Yes, Celia, I like him very much indeed."

"Be careful that every one does not see what I have seen to-night—that you are in love with him," said Celia, laughingly; but try as hard as she could she could not drown the bitter sneer in her tone.

Rose looked up in dismay.

"In love with Mr. Montague!" she cried distressedly. "Oh, no, Celia, that could never be. I could not love him if I would, I dare not!"

"Why," asked Celia, gazing into the face raised to hers; "do you love some one else? Have you ever had a lover?"

A terrified look flashed into the dark eyes into which she was looking. There was that in their dark depths which quite belied the "No," she uttered so faintly, frightened at having told so much.

"I do not believe her," thought Celia. "She has too pretty a face to escape the notice of men and attracting some one of them."

"Never had a lover?" repeated Celia. "That's strange; why, what part of the country did you come from?"

Not for worlds would Rose have told her.

"My past was not a very happy one," she admitted, faintly. "I would rather not discuss it."

That night when Celia went to her room and was putting "this and that together," to use her own expression, she concluded that there was some dark mystery in the past life of Rose Hall, and if there was not a lover in the case why was it that she "dare not love any one?"

"I'll ferret this matter out," was Celia's mental conclusion. "I shouldn't wonder if she has left a lover behind her, and she has tired of him after seeing what society beaux are like."

Her first move must be to find out where Rose had come from and to write on there making secret inquiries.

But how should she make the discovery of that upon which Rose was so reticent? That was the annoying puzzle.

For an hour or more she paced her room in absorbing thought.

"What a fool I am," she cried at length, "not to have thought of that before; of course there must be addresses among her effects. I will make a search through them at once."

With noiseless feet she glided through the corridor. The door of Rose's room was not fastened and she entered as softly and as silently as a shadow. It was a daring deed which she was about to undertake; but the girl was fearless.

Tired out with the exciting day of pleasure, Rose lay fast asleep on the lace pillow. Instinctively Celia drew

near the couch and looked down upon the flushed face of the sleeper.

Suddenly a low moan broke from Rose's lips.

"No one knows that it is a living lie!" she breathed. "Oh, Lillian do not let him betray me to the world. I could not bear that; I should die!"

Celia Derwent could scarcely repress the cry of triumph that rose to her lips.

"How shrewd I was to suspect the girl of some terrible secret," she thought. "Now it is reduced to a certainty."

The moon's rays, clear and white, threw a bright radiance into the room, rendering every object plainly discernible.

Softly Celia knelt on the carpeted floor examining the contents of the bureau drawer with great care.

There were laces, underwear, bits of ribbon, bows and all the etceteras belonging to a young girl's wardrobe; but not a scrap of paper to give her any clew such as she was looking for.

There was a newspaper carefully tied up. It was dated the 4th of June. Celia searched its columns carefully. She saw that it contained the picture of a young and handsome man. The name beneath the picture read Osric Lawrence; but she never dreamed this had anything to do with its being preserved so carefully. Suddenly her eye fell upon the torn leaf of a memorandum. With eager hands the girl seized it and bore it to her own room, a smile of wicked triumph lighting up her pale face.

CHAPTER VIII.

In a moment Celia Derwent had gained her own room, smoothed out the crumpled leaf of the memorandum and held it to the gaslight, scanning the writing upon it with breathless eagerness.

There were but a few words, evidently in Rose's handwriting, and read:

"I can not bear the separation from Lillian much longer, oh, if the heart of Hulda Martin would but relent toward me."

"Now who in the world can Hulda Martin and Lillian be?" thought Celia. "My first move must be to solve that puzzle. What if I should unearth some dark mystery in the past life of Rose Hall; what would the result be, I wonder? Aunt Margaret would turn her from the house, and she would be disgraced forever in the eyes of Royal Montague. Such a prospect is well worth working for."

From that night a silent foe was upon Rose's path; a foe, who in the guise of friendship, was to track her down to her doom.

The morning after the grand ball the first thought that came to Rose as she opened her dark bright eyes to the morning sunlight was: When should she see handsome Royal Montague again; would he call at Linden Villa that afternoon?

He did call, and he found Rose looking prettier than ever in her white mull dress and crimson ribbons; her eyes shone with a glad light as she held out her little white hand and welcomed him. Celia's welcome was no less cordial, although she saw plainly he had no eyes for her when Rose was near.

Days lengthened into weeks, the summer was almost

drawing to a close. Yet, Royal Montague had lingered in the vicinity of Linden Villa, and each afternoon found him a visitor there. Mrs. Hall was well pleased, and to Rose the coming of Royal Montague was the wine of life. She had drifted into loving him with all the passionate strength of her heart.

She had shut the past out of her thoughts, and given herself up to the dream of the present. Alas! that the dream being so sweet should be so sinful. Women have the art of deceiving themselves cruelly when love is at stake; but how a woman knowing that her husband lives, can give herself up to a dream of another face and another voice is a puzzle!

A faint intuition came to Rose that she should have fled from the love that had taken possession of her; but she would stifle her conscience by crying out: "That she had had such a dreary childhood, and the future was to be such a cruel blank, that these few hours of pleasure would be all she would have to look back to in her lonely life; surely Heaven would not deprive her of the friendship—for it could never be anything more)—that was so sweet to her!"

So few, alas! so few! have the self-control, the self-restraint to deprive themselves of that which attracts them for conscience's sake; and those who love the danger perish in it. The very great evil of all sin is the glamour it throws over the sinner.

It would have been hard for Royal Montague himself to have analyzed his feelings toward beautiful Rose Hall; he could not deny that he was charmed with her, that he found her society delightfully agreeable; that the touch of her hand thrilled his heart; that the glance of those wondrous dark eyes magnetized him; that her

glowing beauty bewitched him. A man could not well help being bewitched by that gypsyish piquant face; the crimson laughing mouth and dimpled rosy cheeks; but it was hardly love that filled Royal Montague's heart; it was deep reverent admiration as yet. What it might come to in the future he did not stop to consider.

At this juncture of affairs a strange event happened that changed the whole current of three human lives.

One morning the papers contained a startling announcement; it was the burning of the prison in which Osric Lawrence had been confined. His name headed the death-roll.

Mrs. Hall read the graphic details of the account at the breakfast-table. Celia Derwent listened with interest, but Rose turned away with a dead-white, agonized face. True she did not love the man who had met with such a horrible and untimely fate. He had blighted her life. Still, she had been bound to him by the most solemn tie this world holds. She was tender of heart; she wept for him, even though she knew his death had set her free.

Now there was no reason why she should not give herself up to the sweet dreams that possessed her—no reason why she should withhold the idolatrous love of her heart from Royal Montague.

Day after day Royal and Rose were thrown constantly into each other's society, and he must have been blind not to notice the love that shone in the girl's eyes, for the language of the eyes reveals eloquently that which never passes the lips.

Matters came to a crisis in a sudden and unexpected manner.

One afternoon Royal had ridden over to Linden Villa on one of the fiery chargers that belonged to a brother officer at the camp. His companions warned him against using the animal, for, to use their own expression, they saw that the devil was in him by the wicked, cunning glance of his eyes as he pranced and pawed.

The daring young fellow only laughed as he vaulted gracefully into the saddle, grasped the bridle, and was off like the wind in the direction of Linden Villa.

One of the servants saw him approaching, and hurried down to open the entrance gate for him. Whether it was the creaking noise of the gate as it swung back on its hinges, or the white handkerchief that fluttered in the groom's hand that caused the terrible accident at that moment, no one ever knew.

For a swift instant the animal quivered as if with an electric shock; the next he had wheeled so suddenly about as to unseat his rider, plunged madly forward, reared, and dashed riderless down the road with the speed of the wind.

Royal Montague, unconscious and bleeding, was carried into the house, laid upon the sofa in the drawing room, and a doctor quickly summoned.

Mrs. Hall and Celia were out shopping. There was no one at home but Rose. A wild cry burst from her lips when she saw who it was they had lain upon the sofa. She knelt down beside him with the most piteous cries, raising his head in her white arms, and brushing the dust from his pale, handsome face.

"Leave me with him until the doctor comes," she cried, motioning them all away; and silently they quitted the room, closing the door softly after them;

but through the open windows the girl's wailing cries floated out to them. "Royal, my love, oh, my love! if you die Heaven must let me die too!" she sobbed, covering the white face, the closed eyes and matted hair with passionate kisses in her terrible grief. "What will life be to me without you? Oh, my love, my love," she sobbed, "you will never know how well I love you! I would give my life for yours—I would meet death to save you one pang!"

She clasped the unconscious form closer in her white arms, caressing him with piteous agony, and murmuring broken words of love over him, and her heart and soul were in the quivering kiss she laid on the unconscious lips.

Unconscious, did I say? It was not quite that. For a few moments the force of the fall stunned and bewildered Royal Montague, but the action of the cold water with which Rose bathed his face brought back his dazed senses at once.

He felt the clinging arms about him, the passionate kisses on his cheek and brow; the wailing, broken words of love that were sobbed out over him, fell like a shock upon his startled ears. Sheer amazement and consternation chained his dazed senses. Should he open his eyes and falter, "Forgive me, Rose, I have unconsciously discovered your love for me?" It would be embarrassing to the girl's proud nature; yet it was equally embarrassing to him to receive the assurances of her love with closed eyes—she believing him unconscious.

Royal Montague was a gentleman and a man of honor, yet, between duty and delicacy he scarcely

knew which way to turn. Fortunately the doctor's quick footsteps relieved him in his trying dilemma.

The usual restoratives were applied, then he dared open his eyes.

Rose stood beside him with a white, scared face.

"Oh, doctor, tell me—I can not bear suspense—is he badly hurt or not?" he heard her inquire piteously.

"Badly hurt?" repeated the doctor. "I am glad to say he has had a miraculous escape. He has been stunned, that is all. In the course of a day or two he will be all right."

The doctor's predictions proved quite true. During the days of convalescence Royal remained at Linden Villa—Mrs. Hall would consent to nothing else. Celia Derwent was more than devoted to him—she read to him, she sung for him, she played low, tender melodies for him—everything to show how interested she was in him.

Rose stood by strangely silent, but when her trembling hands touched his, or lay for a moment cool and soft as lily leaves upon his hot brow, they told their own story—of Rose's deep love for him.

The secret that he had discovered puzzled and troubled Royal Montague not a little. He was amazed that any one should love him so much—that it was of such vital importance to any one whether he lived or died. His heart was touched—he was greatly perplexed.

He was a thorough gentleman, and the question which agitated him was, what should he do? He admired beautiful Rose Hall exceedingly; but he had never dreamed that she—the beauty of the season—would marry him. He had felt no tendency whatever

to fall in love with her. He had never imagined himself fascinating enough to win anything more than kindly friendship from brilliant Rose Hall, who could count admirers by the score.

The discovery that she loved him in secret surprised him beyond measure. Then his thoughts took another turn. Why not ask Rose to become his wife?—she was as beautiful as a dream and she loved him with all her heart. It was not possible that he would ever care for any one more than he cared for Rose.

CHAPTER IX.

Royal Montague's thoughts took definite shape.

Yes, he would carry out the resolution he had arrived at without delay—he would ask Rose to be his wife before he left Linden Villa.

He had received letters which necessitated his presence in New York at once, and he decided to ask permission of Mrs. Hall to speak to Rose before he went.

Although Mrs. Hall was secretly delighted, she was too diplomatic to let Royal see how pleased she was.

“Rose is very young, Royal,” she said. “She has never yet given a thought to love or lovers. It would be well to think this matter over before giving you an answer. Do you think Rose cares for you?” she added, earnestly.

“I have reason to believe so,” he answered, and she never dreamed that it was aught save his love for her peerless Rose that brought the flush to his handsome face.

“I will do my best to make her happy,” he went on modestly.

"I am sure you would," replied Mrs. Hall hastily.

She felt sure that Rose's future would be happily assured if she were Royal Montague's wife.

"She is different from other girls," she went on, thoughtfully; "love will make or mar her life. She is not one of those who could love lightly."

"I can well believe that," answered Royal Montague, gently; "but," he urged, "you will surely permit me to speak to her before I go away? delays are often dangerous;" and before the interview was over Mrs. Hall had consented.

The dusk had crept up while they were talking, and when he left her he went into the starlit grounds, odorous with the breath of the pale primroses, where he knew he would find Rose.

Neither of them knew there had been a silent listener to that interview—that from the vine-wreathed balcony just outside the window Celia Derwent had heard all. Her pale lips twitched and her bosom heaved convulsively.

She had seen that it would come to this from the very first; yet she had been powerless to prevent it. But again she registered the strange vow that she had made when she first saw Rose Hall's face—that she should never wed Royal Montague. She would part them at the very altar.

How well she kept that vow of vengeance we shall see.

Out in the fragrance of the starlit garden Royal had sought Rose and found her, and there among the waving lindens sighing softly amid the wooing breezes of the night-wind, the old, sweet story was repeated—the old, sweet story of love that has thrilled the

hearts of generations past and gone when youth was in its prime and love was the bright dream of life—the old, old story that will thrill the hearts of countless thousands yet unborn when the rapture of love's whisperings shall be but a dim memory with us.

“You have not given me my answer, Rose,” said Royal Montague, bending his handsome head and looking at the fair face upon which the radiant moonlight fell.

To have saved her life Rose could not have answered him; her heart was too full. He saw her glance up at the fleecy clouds; but he did not know that she was crying out from the depths of her very soul:

“Oh, Heaven, I thank thee for giving me the one desire of my life!”

He was startled at the gaze in the lovely dark eyes that were raised to his face as he whispered the words that were the sweetest music to her.

What answer she made him the night-winds nor the listening roses will never divulge. It must have satisfied Royal, however, for he bent his handsome head and kissed the sweet lips, and she did not rebuke him. Only Heaven knew how well she loved him.

An hour later Royal had left Linden Villa and was on his way to New York; yet, Rose Hall still stood upon the spot where he had left her. It was pitiful to see how the beautiful girl idolized the handsome lover from whom she had just parted.

Tears would have come to the eyes of those all unused to pity, to have seen her kneel upon the spot where he had stood; lay her soft cheek against the crimson bells and silver leaves his white hands had

touched as he stood there talking to her, murmuring how kind God had been to her to give her the love her heart craved so.

She quite forgot the law of God that the heart should never hold an earthly idol. She would have chosen death with her love rather than have lived without him.

Mrs. Hall was sitting in her favorite arm-chair by the window when Rose entered her *boudoir*, glided up to her side, knelt at her feet, laying her flushed cheek against the jeweled hands in the silken lap.

"Grandma, dear," murmured the girl; "I am so wondrously happy!"

"I can guess why, my darling," said the old lady, raising the pretty blushing face and kissing it repeatedly. "Royal has asked you to be his wife, and you have consented."

Rose nodded her head, and then to escape the questions that she knew would be sure to follow and have to be answered, she ran away to her own room with a gay happy laugh, as blithe and light of heart as a school girl. Ah, well, hearts in which love holds sway are always happy. It is only those who have found that love is as fickle as the April sunlight, or those who have suffered for want of love, only those find this beautiful world of ours dreary.

It was a pity that the beautiful dream of Rose Hall was to be broken so cruelly, and alas, so soon!

At the moment she was parting from Royal Montague in the starlit garden of Linden Villa, quite another scene was transpiring on the little island down by the Maine coast.

In the silence of the summer night, a little boat in

which a stranger sat, came dancing over the silvery waves heading straight for the light-house. For an instant the man rested upon his oars as he neared it, and his very heart was in the gaze he bent upon it.

His soul seemed to leap from him and reach the old light-house in advance of his body, dart through the open window and search those dreary rooms until it found its mate.

The man was Osric Lawrence; he had escaped the terrible conflagration unharmed, and traveled by night and day incessantly to reach the lonely island where a few short months ago he had left a beautiful young bride with the wedding-ring which had cost him so dear, upon her finger.

What had she thought when the sunlit summer days came and went and brought him not; the weeks lengthened into months; yet no line from him reached her. What had his beautiful Rose thought? had she pined away and died through the cold neglect? Had she waited for him in vain on the spot where they had parted, as he had bade her do, until her tender young heart broke?

Hot burning tears fell from Osric Lawrence's eyes. It never occurred to him that the terrible story of his folly had reached his young bride in her isolated island home; the saddest, yet simplest story that ever was written of a young man's downfall; of the sin he had drifted into in appropriating that which was not his own in a mad moment of temptation.

He had said that he would replace what he was taking, but we all know of that place which is paved with good intentions.

Oh, if he had but met his beautiful Rose before he

had lent himself to such terrible folly, life would have been different with him! "But it was not too late yet," he promised himself, with a sob; her love should redeem him.

How he would clasp her in his arms! how he would kiss her lovely face as he strained her to his heart, and weep such tears over her as seldom fall from the eyes of man! And from the moment his lips touched hers a new life should begin for him. He was still young, accomplished. He would live down the past, and build up for himself a beautiful future.

He would take Rose quietly away—he would take her so far away that no one would ever see or recognize him. They believed he was dead—buried under the smoldering ruins of the prison-wall—so must they think for all time.

The little boat grated on the beach, and he sprung ashore, his feet barely touching the white sand as he flew breathlessly up the path to the door of the old light-house.

For a moment he drew back with his hand upon the old-fashioned knocker.

How his heart beat! Strong man that he was, he trembled; his breath came hot and quick. What if it were Rose who opened the door for him? Even though a hundred eyes were on him, how could he restrain himself from catching her in his arms, crying out, "Oh, Rose! my beauteous bride! I have come back to you, at last!"

A voice broke the solemn and terrible stillness. It was not Rose's voice. He remembered the low, crooning voice; it was the old servant.

He touched the brass knocker with a trembling

hand, and it seemed to him the length of eternity before the door was opened.

He knew that he must ask for Abel Martin, the old light-house keeper; he dared not call for Rose.

The door was opened at length, and the woman started back in surprise at the white face that was turned toward her. She recognized the stranger at once as the young man whom pretty Rose Hall had rescued the night of the terrible storm, and who had remained at the light-house nearly a fortnight in consequence of the sprained arm he had received.

"I should like to see Mr. Martin," he said; but even as he spoke his yearning eyes roved past her to see if he could discern a glove, a hat, a bit of ribbon—anything that would be likely to belong to Rose.

The serving woman started back with a little cry of consternation.

"Perhaps you haven't heard the sad news, sir," she said. "Poor Mr. Martin has been dead this many a month."

The shock was so great Osric Lawrence fell back against the casement of the door like one who had been dealt a heavy blow.

"But the family, where are they? Where is Rose?" he gasped, and the voice which asked the question was scarcely human in its agonizing intensity. "Where is Rose?" he repeated. "In God's name tell me quickly—is not Rose Hall here?"

CHAPTER X.

The old servant gazed in dismay at the white face of the stranger who stood on the threshold; but she answered quickly:

“They are all gone, sir; my brother and I have charge of the light-house now. Miss Rose ran away long months ago; it was that which broke poor old Abel’s heart. After he died the rest went away, sir.”

Osric Lawrence heard but those few words:

“Rose had fled from there long months ago!”

He caught his breath with a terrible cry; had Rose heard of what he had done? had she confessed to them that she was his wife? had they turned her out into the cold world? but no, the woman before him was telling him Rose had fled, and they had grieved after her.

“But why, how was it? why did Rose go?” he cried. “In Heaven’s name answer me quickly, for I am desperate. You lived here among them, you heard what they said; what they talked about; you have some idea why she went away and where she went to.”

“Oh, yes, I heard why she went, sir; she grew tired of this lonely life; Miss Rose was a gay, blithe lassie, sir; some one who had taken a great fancy to her, and who had plenty of money pleaded with her to go; there was a stormy scene here; they almost cursed her; she went to the stranger, and her name was never mentioned here after that.”

The man before her stood panting, gasping, white as death; the veins stood out in his forehead like whip-cords, and his hands trembled.

“You say she went with a stranger; was it a man

or woman; speak, tell me it was neither lover nor—
nor—”

His voice died away in a tearless sob; he could not finish the sentence, the words choked him, his brain was reeling.

“Oh, no, sir, it was with no lover. She went to a proud and haughty woman, a relative of the family’s. Yet for long years great enmity had existed between them; that is why they almost cursed her, sir; because she took it into her head all of a sudden to leave here and go to their enemy.”

“How long ago did you say that was?” asked Osric Lawrence in the same unearthly voice.

“Oh, a very long time ago, sir; a few days after you were here, sir. I remember the time well, because Hulda Martin and her niece were away to Stony Point at about that time, and it happened shortly after they came back.”

“But did Rose not write after she went away?” he inquired excitedly; “did she leave no address, no clew by which she might be found?”

The woman shook her head.

“‘She is as one dead to us!’ those were their words, sir; ‘she will be a grand lady now,’ they said; ‘she will marry some one of great wealth in the magnificent home where she has gone; nothing is left for us but to forget that we ever knew and loved Rose Hall.’ That is all I know about it—all I can tell you, sir.”

Slowly the horrible truth came home to him; he quite believed that she had not heard of the misfortune that had befallen him. She had not waited and pined for his return; but, in the fickleness of her

woman's heart she had repented of that hasty marriage; and it was to escape him she had run away, taking refuge with those whose aid she had never sought until then.

She had not revealed her secret marriage; and she had left no clew by which he could trace her when he came for her.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him, he would find out where the Martin family had gone. They could tell him where Rose was. Strange he had not thought of it before.

The reply to the eager query bereft him of the last ray of hope.

After Rose had gone and the old light-house keeper died, Hulda Martin and her other niece, Lillian, had left the place, no one knew their destination. Hulda Martin had left but one message:

"If Rose ever came back and inquired for them to tell her 'she was as one dead to them—never through life would their paths cross again!'"

"And that is all you can tell me?" said Osric Lawrence, and the woman before him guessed something of the truth when she looked up at him and saw great burning tears rolling down his cheeks—he loved Rose Hall.

If a man's heart can break and he yet live Osric Lawrence's heart broke then.

As he turned away and staggered down the white sand from the light-house all the good that was in his nature died.

A step sounded on the sand beside him. It was the old servant. She had followed him. She was

sorry for the young man. She laid her brown hand on his arm:

"Were you Rose Hall's lover, sir?" she asked. "If you were I have something to tell you."

The light that came into his face was pitiful to see.

"Rose had left some message for him with this woman and she had just remembered it."

That was the thought that flashed through his mind.

"Yes, I was her lover," he gasped. "She was more to me than the whole world—more to me than my life."

"Did you give her a ring as a token of your love?"

Osric drew back and looked at the woman a moment, hesitatingly, then answered a low, hoarse "Yes."

"Then I feel sorry for you, sir," she said, "for the night before she went away I saw her standing by yonder window. She took something from her neck which had been fastened to it by a ribbon, and as she held it up toward the moon's rays I saw that it was a glittering ring such as fine ladies wear. 'I will fling this from me as I fling all thoughts, all love, all memory of the giver from me,' I heard her say; with that she tossed the ring from her far out into the waves. I have been sorry a hundred times that I did not tell Hulda Martin, or Abel, what I saw and heard that night."

Osric Lawrence turned from her with a terrible cry. Those words had been the death warrant to his hopes. In that moment he almost learned to hate the beautiful girl-bride he had wedded.

Let her beware of him. The world is wide, but not

so wide but that he would find her sooner or later. Like one driven mad he turned without a word and plunged once more into the soft, sweet shadows of the night.

When Royal Montague had parted from Rose he had gone at once to the depot, and a few minutes later was *en route* to New York. His thoughts were of Rose, peerless Rose, whose smiles others had sought in vain, who had turned from them, one and all, because she loved him.

It was pleasant to know that he had the power of awakening such love. His vanity was flattered; the very fondness of this lovely girl for him drew his heart toward her.

He had written to his mother that he would be home on the twentieth instant; he knew she would be waiting for him, and he knew who else would be waiting for him—pretty Evelyn Gray, a great favorite of his mother's, and who always managed to secure invitations to the house when the handsome young son was at home.

Should he make known his engagement to Rose?—that was the question he asked himself over and over again, as he walked hastily up the avenue.

No carriage had been sent to meet him, owing to the frequency of the incoming trains, and not knowing which of them he might take.

It had been the hand of Fate that prompted Royal Montague to alight from one of the down-town cars, and walk the greater part of the way in the direction of the avenue on which he resided.

Two ladies were walking in advance of him; one

was elderly and heavy set, the other was young and graceful. The voice of one was shrill and complaining, the other as sweet and mild as the soft, low chiming of a silver bell. Yet Royal Montague would have passed them by without a thought or glance had not a singular event happened.

In stepping from the pavement to the cross-walk the elder woman slipped and fell.

A terrified cry broke from the young girl's lips—a cry that brought Royal Montague to their assistance in an instant.

“What can I do for you?” he inquired; but, as he asked, his quick eyes took in the situation at a glance.

The bright rays of the gas-lamp fell full upon the face the young girl raised to him—the most beautiful face he had ever beheld, framed in a mass of golden hair.

“My Aunt Hulda has fallen—she has fainted, sir!” she said, with a piteous quiver of the lips. “If you would be so kind as to call a cab for us, I should be most grateful.”

In an instant he had darted off to do her bidding. Luckily a cab was within hailing distance, and Royal secured it at once. ad

He assisted the driver in placing the unfortunate woman in the vehicle. The younger one, with her blue eyes full of tears, murmured her thanks. The door closed with a bang, and the cab rolled rapidly up the avenue, and was soon lost to sight in the darkness.

Royal Montague stopped, and drawing a memorandum from his pocket, hastily jotted down the street

and number the young girl had given the driver. Why he did this he himself could not have told.

"I thank you in my Aunt Hulda Martin's name," she had said to him. "I am her niece, Lillian."

"Lillian," he repeated musingly, as he walked slowly homeward. "Was there ever a face so fair?—the name suits her well!"

Something in the glance of those blue eyes thrilled Royal Montague's heart. In that one moment his life seemed to change—a pair of blue eyes had driven out of his heart all thoughts of Rose—Rose who loved him so, and to whom he had so lately plighted his troth!

CHAPTER XI.

Royal Montague walked slowly homeward, still thinking of the fair young girl from whom he had just parted.

"I must call to-morrow on my way down town and inquire if her aunt is better," he thought.

Mrs. Montague welcomed her handsome son warmly. She quite idolized this stalwart, broad-shouldered son of hers.

Evelyn Gray held out the rosy tips of her fingers, her pale-blue eyes sparkling with delight.

"We have been looking for you since early morning, Royal," she said. "It is quite cruel of you to keep us waiting so long."

"I am more than sorry, Evelyn," he replied, contritely; "but now that I am home, I shall endeavor to make full amends."

An hour or more he remained in the drawing-room with the ladies before going up to his own room; and

twice he made the mistake of calling Evelyn, Lillian.

"I shall not sing for you any more, Royal," she pouted, rising from the piano. "It is plainly evident you have not been listening; your thoughts are elsewhere."

He laughed carelessly.

"That is only your fancy, Evelyn," he answered.

She had sung one of her most impassioned love songs and he had not even heard it.

"Good-night, Royal," she said; and before he was quite aware of it, he found himself alone.

Royal Montague passed a restless night; all through his dreams he could hear the music of a sweet girlish voice, and see a fair troubled face, but it was not the face of Rose Hall.

Early the next day, quite as soon as etiquette permitted, Royal Montague, with a superb bouquet in hand, presented himself at the house the location of which he had jotted down the night before in his memorandum. He sent up the flowers and his card, requesting to know if the accident had proven serious.

Lillian herself answered the inquiry in person. She saw before her the handsome young man who had rendered them such timely service at the time of the accident. He saw that the beautiful blue eyes were red and swollen with weeping.

"My aunt is much easier, thank you, sir," she said. "We sent for the doctor immediately upon reaching home, and he found that Aunt Hulda's ankle was badly sprained. It will be several weeks, we fear, before she is able to be about, and the pain is intense."

And the lovely blue eyes raised to his were brimming over with tears.

"Is there anything I can do for her?" he asked. Then he remembered that he was an entire stranger, and that the answer would certainly be a polite "no."

Lillian shook her head.

"You are very kind," she said simply, "but there is nothing you can do for her."

"You will not think me impertinent if I call to inquire, now and then, if she is better?" he asked eagerly.

"I could not think any one impertinent for taking an interest in the welfare of my dear unfortunate aunt," said the girl, gravely.

From that morning marvelous bouquets and baskets of delicate fruit found their way to Hulda Martin's sick-room. Royal Montague was the florist's best customer. Volumes of poems often accompanied the flowers, and now and then a note expressing the hope that Mrs. Martin was recovering.

"I should like to thank him for his kindness to me, Lillian," said Hulda, one day. "The next time the young man calls invite him into the sitting-room."

"Oh, aunt," cried Lillian, glancing around in dismay, "our lodgings look so shabby, and he is such a gentleman. I don't like to invite him up and let him see how poor we are."

"If he has any sense he knows that we are not rich, living on the third floor of a New York flat," declared Hulda emphatically; "he must know, too, that we have to work for a living, so you can go right on

with your fan-painting even if he is sitting here. You needn't mind him."

The next time Royal called he was delighted at being invited up into the sitting-room, where Mrs. Martin sat. She was reclining in her great arm-chair by the window. Lillian sat by the table, her fair face bent over the pale-pink roses she was deftly painting on the satin fans.

She blushed when she saw his eyes, so full of admiration bent upon her. He did not say much to Lillian, but devoted himself entirely to win the liking of the aunt.

When he went away that morning, Hulda Martin voted him the most perfect gentleman she had ever met.

"Is it not wonderful, Lillian," she added; "that he should take such an interest in me?"

Lillian bent lower over the fans she was coloring, making no reply.

Many a time that day the handsome face of their visitor rose before her. She liked to recall the words he had said, and the glance of his eyes.

From that day Royal was a constant visitor to Hulda Martin. At first he argued himself into the belief that if a few flowers or books brought pleasure to them, if his cheery words made their life brighter, what harm could there be in his coming?

In obedience to her aunt's wishes, Lillian had adopted her name, Martin. From the moment Rose had left them, Hulda could never bear the name of Hall mentioned in her presence.

Lillian did not even know where Rose had gone; Hulda had carefully destroyed the address.

Poor Lillian did not even know that the great city of New York, where she and her aunt had come in search of employment when the old light-house keeper died, was the winter home of the proud, old lady—the haughty grandmother who had coaxed their beautiful Rose from them by the power of her glittering gold.

It happened thus that Royal Montague knew Lillian Hall as Lillian Martin.

Hulda Martin had long since discovered what the magnet was that brought handsome Royal Montague, the banker's son, to their humble lodgings. She watched them when they met and when they parted, and she told herself that Royal was certainly in love. She made no comments to Lillian, who was not one of those girls one could discuss a love affair with; she was so coy and bashful she would be greatly distressed.

The time came when Royal Montague stood face to face with the knowledge of his secret. He had begun to realize what he was doing, to know that the sweet witchery, the glamour falling over him was all love; to realize that he lived only in fair Lillian Martin's presence, and without her life would be a blank; to realize that he loved Lillian with the one great love of his life, before which all others grew pale and dim.

He said to himself that if marriages were made in heaven, Lillian was the one intended for him, that she was the only one in this world he could love.

He knew that at last he had met his fate; that he, Royal Montague, engaged to marry the beautiful

heiress, Rose Hall, loved with his whole heart another.

He, the very soul of honor, had fallen into this state of blind worship without realizing it until it was too late; fallen into the deepest pit love ever digs for the feet of man.

He had never trembled at the touch of a young girl's hand before. Now if his hand touched hers, if her dress brushed against him as she passed by him, his heart thrilled with a sense so keen it was almost pain.

He quite believed that Lillian was not indifferent to him; he could read her thoughts in a thousand different ways.

If he had been free he would have asked Lillian Martin to be his wife.

"I wish!" he cried to himself in vain reproach, "that I had not been so impetuous in asking poor Rose to marry me; would to heaven it were to be done over again!"

He cried out at the strange fate that had befallen him. Rose, who loved him better than her own life, was as beautiful as a goddess. Yet his heart had not gone out to her as it had to Lillian. He was grateful to Rose for the love she had lavished upon him; but he could not give her in return that love that comes to a man's heart but once in a lifetime.

He saw now what a terrible mistake he had made in asking Rose to marry him; simply because he had discovered the girl's great love for himself; and now that he was bound in faith and honor to her, he had met the one above all others whom he loved and would have wedded but for Rose.

He loved one girl with all the strength of his heart—and was promised to another!

Long tender letters came to him from Rose; but his handsome face grew whiter as he read them. Ah, if Rose had but loved him less!

He was perplexed, greatly troubled; how he reproached himself for yielding to the temptation of gazing upon Lillian's fair-face, drinking in the music of her voice, when he was in honor bound to marry another.

He knew that he should have kept away from Lillian when the sweet dream of love began to steal over him.

"If I marry Rose!" he cried out in the bitterness of his heart, "I shall be miserable all my life long."

Each letter from Rose breathed over and over again the girl's great absorbing love for him.

"You are the light of my life, Royal," she wrote.

"You are to me what the sunlight is to the flowers. If you ever loved me less death would be welcome. Oh, Royal, my darling, I am often frightened at my passionate worshipful love for you."

When Royal Montague read such letters as these which each day brought him, his handsome face would grow whiter and he would cry out that his doom was indeed sealed.

CHAPTER XII.

Royal Montague laid down Rose's letter with a groan of despair. Every line, every word revealed to him the girl's idolatrous love for him.

He almost hated himself because he could not give her back love for love.

There was but one course to pursue; he must go to Rose and in a manly, straightforward manner tell her his story. He must say to her:

"I am bound to you, Rose, but I love another. It is for you to decide what my future will be. I leave my fate, my happiness in your hands."

If she still clung to him, refusing to give him up, he would marry her. He would be a true husband; he would give her reverence, respect, everything but love, that was not his to give, for his heart had gone out to another.

On the contrary, if she released him he would bless her for the generous action. His gratitude would be boundless, for it would enable him to woo and win fair, sweet Lillian.

He was glad when he read in one of Rose's letters that they would be in New York by the first of the following month.

"I am very anxious to see you, Royal," she wrote, "for it is more than a month since you left Linden Villa."

Rose loved him so blindly that she did not notice the growing coldness and the shortness of his letters.

As the weeks rolled by, and Royal showed no intention of running up to Linden Villa to see Rose, Mrs. Hall grew a little uneasy over the matter. She knew what it meant when a man commences to make excuses about having no time to spare. She knew that when a man is deeply and thoroughly in love he will let nothing interfere with his visits to his loved one—business, everything must stand back for love's sweet sake.

Mrs. Hall was not pleased. Linden Villa was not

such a great distance from New York, surely he could have come up once a week at least, if he had had the inclination to do so. She noticed that his letters to Rose came less frequently. These were not very good signs to the experienced eyes of Mrs. Hall, for that reason she decided to come to the city a little earlier than she had otherwise intended to do.

She watched with anxious eyes the meeting between Royal and Rose. The girl's face shone with delight and love; her lover's face looked white and haggard. The words which fell from his lips seemed forced; he was certainly ill at ease.

It was no wonder. A fair, spiritual face, crowned with a halo of golden hair, and a pair of sweet, pleading pansy-blue eyes rose up before his mental vision, entirely blotting out the dark, glowing beauty of the girl beside him.

Royal knew what was expected of him when Rose came tripping into the room bright and glowing as the flowers she wore. He took the little dusky hand in his and bending over kissed the lovely, laughing lips.

"How white you are, Royal," she cried. "Have you been ill? You have lost all your bright, cheery, genial manner which made you so—so irresistible."

He flushed uneasily and looked confused. What would she have said if she had known why he looked so gloomy, that he was trying to summon courage to tell her the story that was to blight her beautiful love-dream?

They were standing together beside a jardinière filled with odorous blossoms. He had clasped Rose's hands; yet he hardly knew how to begin, she was look-

ing up at him so fondly with those great, luminous eyes of hers.

"I have been so lonely without you, Royal," she said, drooping her beautiful head nearer to him—"even in crowds I have been inexpressibly lonely. There was one evening in particular that I was very miserable," she said, nestling closer to him. "I had intended going to a lawn *fête* that night: It was on Thursday—that was the day I always received your precious letters; but on this day none came, and my heart was by far too sore and heavy to dance, laugh, and jest. I cried myself to sleep that night, and, as the hours wore on, such strange fancies filled my mind, that perhaps you had ceased to love me."

Royal Montague's handsome face grew pale; he winced under the words.

"What would you do, Rose," he said, drawing the slender figure toward him, and trying to speak carelessly, "if such a thing were to really happen?"

He never liked to remember the face she raised to him—the strange light in the dark eyes, the pallor of the laughing lips.

"I should go mad, Royal," she said, solemnly. "I could not die and leave the bright world that held you—my spirit would not leave it. I should be like the girl of the story, who threw herself in the sea because her lover had proven false. The blue waves eddying around her laughed and sported with her. They would not bring the death which she craved; they tossed her out of harm's way upon the white sands, and there her friends found her. She looked up at them with wild, dilating, burning eyes.

"'Heaven would not let me die,' she said, 'I have

a mission to perform; I am to haunt my lover. He is the sunshine; I will be the shadow. No other love shall ever rest in his arms, smile under his caresses!

“They looked into her eyes and started back, tears of silent pity springing to their own; for they saw that she was quite mad—her false lover had driven her mad! That would be my fate, Royal, if you should ever cease to care for me.”

“What if death took me from you, Rose—you would get over your loss in time?” he said, hesitatingly.

The lovely white arms crept around his neck; the beautiful face paled, and the dark head buried itself upon his breast.

“If you died, I would die too, Royal,” she said, with a gasping sob. “When I looked upon your face, cold in death, my heart would break!”

“How well you must love me, Rose!” he groaned.

She laughed such a low, happy laugh.

“I could not express how well I love you, dear,” she said. “You are my world!”

The great love she lavished upon him wearied him. He could not help contrasting her at that moment with fair, sweet Lillian, whom a bold wooer would have frightened, as a huntsman frightens a timid bird.

The evening passed, and he took his leave with the words he had come there to say unspoken. It would have been easier to plunge a dagger into the breast of Rose Hall than utter the words he had come there to say; they died away unspoken on his lips.

It would be easier to write the truth to her, he thought. He wrote the letter, intending to put it into Rose's hands, yet each day his courage failed him

when he saw how completely the girl's heart had gone out to him, how she lived upon his words and smiles.

He could realize but too well the truth of her words: "If she were to lose him, she would go mad, or die." He was beginning to see that love would have to be sacrificed on the altar of duty.

Looking forward through the long years of his future, he saw no gleam of brightness if he married Rose Hall. He knew that he was not the first man who had married one girl while he loved another. He had not been the first who had gone through that terrible struggle between duty and inclination. Yes, he must marry Rose. His love for sweet Lillian Martin would be but a dream of the sweet possibilities of "what might have been," and he resolved to see her never again.

Heaven alone knew what his resolutions cost him, how yearning impulse urged him to see Lillian just once more, to bid her farewell. He would have been wise if he had not yielded to temptation. He was playing with fire.

"Yes," he told himself, with reckless despair, "he would go once again and bid Lillian good-bye; he would take one last look at the face that held all the beauty of earth and heaven for him. They allowed a condemned criminal to look at the sun while he could, they allowed a dying man to take a last look at the faces he loved. He was going out of her life forever; if a few moments in her presence would be such a source of comfort to him, why need he deprive himself of it? Lillian would never know, when he bent over her little white hand at parting, of the wild throbbing love in his heart; the gentle girl would never know that he could have knelt before her and worshiped her,

and that, if he had only been free, he would have clasped her in his arms, begging her to give him her love, to be his bride.

He promised himself that he would go to see Lillian the following day. Never in his life had the hours dragged so slowly. For the first time in his life he felt ill at ease.

On his way down the avenue he saw a stylish little phaeton approaching from an opposite direction. One glance at the beautiful piquant face of the occupant, and he saw that it was Rose. She drew rein close to the curb-stone.

"Oh, Royal, is this really you?" she cried, extending her dainty hand to him. "I am so glad! You are just in time to go shopping with me. I have something to tell you, Royal," she went on, in a low, happy voice.

"My *trousseau* has arrived from Worth's this morning. My dress and veil are marvels of beauty. I will tell you about them as we drive along."

"Not now, Rose," he exclaimed. "I have a very pressing engagement. I shall be up this evening to hear all about it."

Rose pouted, but drove away smiling. A few moments later her lover, with beating heart, stood before Lillian's door, with a pale, determined face.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was a lovely June morning. Lillian Martin sat at her work, her lovely golden head drooping dejectedly over the delicate fan she was decorating.

The fair face was paler than was its wont, and the blue eyes wore a troubled look in their shadowy depths. Deftly and patiently the little white fingers

covered the delicate satin with gorgeous designs, but it was quite plain to be seen that the girl's heart was not in her work.

Her Aunt Hulda sat watching her in silence.

"Lillian!" she exclaimed at length, "how long is it since young Mr. Montague was here last?"

The fan dropped from Lillian's fingers, and she gave a frightened start.

Had her aunt pierced her thoughts that she asked her that question?

She bent lower over her work, and her fair race grew a shade paler, but she answered the question quietly enough: "It will be two weeks to-morrow since he called."

Hulda Martin knitted her brows together in a dark frown.

"Do you know, Lillian," she said, thoughtfully, "I quite fancied the young man had taken a liking to you."

"Oh, aunt!" cried the girl, bending her golden head lower in distress; "he only called here out of kindness to see how you were progressing. Now that you are getting along so nicely——"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Hulda Martin, impatiently. "I know the ways of men better than you do, and I tell you when a man comes as often as young Royal Montague did, there is something besides a sick woman that attracts him; but," she went on, energetically, "I find he is like all the rest of them, quick to imagine himself in love, and quick to cool off when the glamour of newness wears off."

"Let us not discuss him, aunt," returned Lillian, in a low voice.

"Why not?" asked Hulda, energetically.

"Because he is nothing to us," returned Lillian, "and we are nothing to him. He has been very kind to us; he will be to us only a pleasant memory."

"But his coming made our lives pleasanter," persisted Hulda.

Lillian made no answer.

"I am quite sure he admired you," continued Hulda, "but probably he has seen some other face that pleases him better; men are like weather vanes, Lillian. They have their heads set this way to-day and that way to-morrow."

The girl stretched out her white hands, crushing back the sobbing cry that rose to her lips; how could she bear it if her aunt persisted in pursuing this subject much longer? Long weary hours of the night she had grieved because he had come not, her pillow was wet with tears over a hope deferred.

Mrs. Hulda had no intention of dropping the topic.

"Those who trust to a man's love might as well trust the fickle wind. Never set your heart on one of them, Lillian, until you stand at the altar with him," she declared, emphatically.

"You trusted to Uncle Abel's love, Aunt Hulda," corrected gentle Lillian, gravely. "He was always a good husband to you."

"I married him over twenty years ago, and young men were different in those days. Then, if a young man took you home from singing school, or quilting bee, once or twice, you could feel pretty certain that he intended asking you to marry him; but now you are never sure of 'em if they've been beaung you around

a year. If a prettier face crosses their path, or a shrewd coquette gets hold of 'em, you're left!"

Hulda's lecture on "the ways of young men nowadays" had not been appreciated, it seemed; for, turning round suddenly to see how Lillian had been impressed by it, she found that the girl had quietly left the room.

Lillian had fled to the adjoining apartment, and catching up her sun hat, hastily donned it.

"I must go out into the street," she thought. "Perhaps the hurrying throngs of people will help me to forget him."

Poor, patient, uncomplaining Lillian! her lot was hard enough before, without this handsome stranger shining like the sun across her path, and in the setting leaving it in sudden gloom. Quite unconsciously his face had stolen into her thoughts, waking and sleeping. She had watched for his coming, treasured the flowers he had sent long after they were withered and dead, and the beautiful, sweet poems seemed to voice his sentiments toward her. The sudden discontinuance of his visits showed the girl what life would be without him; the future seemed dark and dreary enough.

"Oh, if I only had Rose to confide my pitiful secret to," she thought, "it would not be so hard to bear! Ah, where was her beautiful, darling Rose?" she wondered, gazing wistfully and tearfully into the faces of fair young girls who passed her by. What part of the world held the beautiful sister who had been tempted from their midst by her proud old grandmother's glittering gold?

Did Rose, her beautiful, reckless, wayward sister, never sigh for her? were the lovely cheeks which had been pressed so often to her own ever wet with silent

tears at the thought of the sister she had so willingly deserted?

“In the midst of all her pomp and splendor, does her heart never crave my presence?” thought Lillian.

A lovely phaeton dashed up the avenue at that moment, the dust from its wheels enveloping Lillian in a cloud as it passed her by. The face of the occupant was turned from her, but there was something in the proud poise of the head, and the rich luster of the dark glossy hair beneath the plumed hat, that reminded her strangely of Rose. She brushed the dust from her dress and passed on with a sigh.

How little she dreamed that the occupant of the phaeton, robed in shimmering, costly silk, and adorned with gems that cost a small fortune, was indeed Rose.

If Rose had turned her haughty head ever so slightly toward the girl who passed by her in the simple straw hat, cotton gloves and modest blue dress, she could not have failed to recognize Lillian.

So engrossed was Lillian with her own thoughts she did not see a gentleman approaching her; she was not aware of Royal Montague's close proximity until she ran directly into his arms.

“Miss Martin!” he exclaimed delightedly.

Lillian started back with a cry of dismay, the hot color rushing to her face in a crimson tide.

“I am so glad of this opportunity of talking with you alone and uninterrupted,” he said in deep agitation. “I have but just come from your home; they told me you were not in; the disappointment was great.”

They were standing opposite Riverside Park; gently but firmly he drew her within the massive gates and

seated her upon one of the benches beneath a spreading oak-tree, taking a seat by her side.

"I came out for a walk," faltered Lillian; "it is not often that I can spare the time; I have been out quite half an hour, I must return directly or Aunt Hulda will be worried about me!"

"Do not talk of leaving me just yet," replied Royal; "I must have a long talk with you."

He looked at the girl's downcast face so fair in the sunlight, then he noticed that the lovely cheeks had lost all their color. He was strangely touched, and the thought flitted through his mind:

"Had he been the cause of it?"

He watched the play of the lovely features, the light in the beautiful eyes—bluer than the hyacinths that blossomed around them, and he went almost mad with love and regret knowing that her fair beauty was not for him.

Lillian's blue eyes drooped still lower under their curling golden lashes. What was it that he was so anxious to say to her? the girl's heart throbbed and the blush deepened on her face.

"I will tell you why I called at the house, Lillian," he said; but instead of continuing he hesitated strangely.

How he longed to tell her the story of his life as they sat there together in the sunlit park; tell her of the rash impulse that had caused him to ask a young and beautiful girl to marry him, because he had discovered that she was infatuated with him.

How he longed to tell her that the girl was beautiful and good. Yet, that while he lived he could not do more than like her; that the fetters which bound

him he must wear; for if this girl lost him she would go mad—or die!

How he longed to tell her that she, whom he could not marry, he had learned to love with a wild passionate worship that would end only with his life.

He remained silent so long that Lillian raised her blue eyes to his face in timid wonder.

She did not know that he was biting his lips, clinching his hands to hold down the hot passionate words that seemed to spring to his lips.

Should he simply say good-bye and leave her, or should he avow his love? he read love for himself in Lillian's eyes as plainly as eyes could speak.

CHAPTER XIV.

With Lillian's sweet face raised to his, how could he speak the words that were to part them for evermore? Royal Montague asked himself in deep distress.

But the words must be spoken; the pain of uttering them must be endured and gotten over sooner or later.

"I will tell you what I have been trying to find courage to say for the last fortnight—it is this, Lillian—you will let me call you Lillian for the first and last time; I am going away, and I came to say good-bye."

For an instant the park, with its green foliage and waving trees, seemed whirling around poor Lillian; the sunshine blotted out from the bright blue sky, shrouding the earth in impenetrable gloom.

Tears sprung to her blue eyes, and her lovely face grew pale as a snow-drop. She tried to utter some careless word, but no sound fell from her lips.

He drew closer to her—he was only human—and

the distress he read in her face touched him to the heart.

"You are grieved, Lillian," he said, "but you can not be more grieved than I. Let me tell you why I must go, Lillian. It is because I have learned to love you. I should never have let my heart go out to you, sweet Lillian, for I am engaged to be married to another!"

Ah, dear Heaven, how the words smote her! With that one sentence the girl's loving heart had been raised to the gates of paradise, only to be dashed again broken and bleeding to the pitiless earth.

He saw her raise her face to the white clouds above, and he thought of the beauty of the pictured faces of angels so like hers. He did not know that she was praying she might die then and there.

How the leaves trembled in the wind; but they did not tremble more than the girl who sat beside him, and he realized but too well what might have been had he but been free to woo and win her.

There was nothing for it but to tell her the truth, then she would see that he must go.

In a low, hoarse, despairing voice he told her all, carefully suppressing all names, and the girl's face paled to the hue of death as she listened.

He told her all, brokenly, of the mad, passionate love the girl lavished upon him, whom he had promised to make his wife.

"I gave her, in return, sympathy and friendly liking, Lillian," he went on, "but not love. I never knew what the strong, deep love of a man meant until I met you. In the hour that I bid you farewell, the best part of my life dies."

She held up her white hands with a gesture of des-

pair. Ah, would that he had left her in cold, unbroken silence! would that she had never known of his love for herself!

He glanced around and saw that they were quite alone in the green park. How he longed to take her in his arms just once and kiss the fair face, the beautiful, quivering lips, and the golden hair, that his eyes must rest on never again, unless he wished to go mad with pain and regret at losing her!

He had told her his story, yet she sat mute beside him, speaking not a word.

"Oh, Lillian!" he cried, "have you no consolation to offer—no word of comfort to say to me?"

"I hope your future will be happier than you now think possible," she said, faintly.

"Is the pain of our parting nothing to you, that you can speak like that, Lillian?" he cried, hoarsely; "if love ever shone in a girl's face, it shines in yours. You love me, Lillian, even as I love you."

She looked up at him with her blue eyes drowned in tears.

"Hush, Mr. Montague. You must remember honor always! You are the promised husband of another, never mind what I think or feel. You are bidding me farewell, let no word pass between us that either will regret."

But he could not regain his composure.

"Lillian," he cried, recklessly, "the pain of giving you up is greater than I can bear, I can not see you pass out of my life like this. I am tempted to clasp you in my arms and fly with you to—"

He stopped abruptly, for her little white hand was laid firmly upon his arm.

"I—I—am willing to say farewell to you kindly, Mr. Montague," she said, "but you must not speak to me in that way."

He was silent. She went on:

"If I have a secret, Mr. Montague, you must not try to force it from me, you must respect it."

"I will," he said, bravely. He knew now that she loved him, but it mattered little, since the knowledge came too late.

His eyes lingered on her fair face. It had never appeared so beautiful to him; the secret she had locked in her heart was all told there; the look was on her face that only one man ever brings to the face of a girl, and that is the man she loves. She might try to hide it, but he could read her secret.

"I think," she said, gently, "that I must go back. My aunt will wonder at my long absence."

"Lillian," he said—"forgive me if I still use the name—you will never be Lillian to me again, this is our farewell, we will never stand here together again. I am to lose you, oh, beautiful love that would have made life so bright for me."

Passionate yearning overcame prudence. He held out his arms to her, his face white with emotion.

"Will you let me clasp you in my arms one brief moment, Lillian? Will you let me kiss your sweet lips, just once?"

She drew back from him with shy sweet grace.

"Do not be angry with me," she said. "I can not!"

He bowed, respecting the decision of her pure heart.

"Any man may safely place his honor in her hands," he thought.

He could not help contrasting the differences be-

tween these two girls who loved him. Rose, impulsive, loving Rose would have twined her white arms, unbidden, around his neck, pressed her dusk cheek to his, murmuring over and over again how she loved him, and the pain that parting with him cost her; but this one, fair Lillian, with a face as pure and sweet as an angel's, could never have caressed him, she was too shy and modest for unmaidenly demonstration; she would not kiss him, loving him as dearly as she did, even though he was passing out of her life and her love, forever.

He respected and revered Lillian all the more for it.

"Good-bye, Mr. Montague," said Lillian, holding out her little hand to him. There were tears in her eyes and in her voice.

"Must it be good-bye?" he asked, a feeling of despair stealing over him, as he took her white hand and held it, longing to weep over it.

"Yes; you have asked another to wed you before you met me, and as a man of honor you must be true to her, and forget that you and I have ever met."

What would she have said or thought if she had known that this strange girl's fate which it was in her power to wreck was Rose, the sister who had deserted her?

Oh, if Royal had but told her! but, alas! before Lillian he could not bring himself to even mention the name of her rival, Rose Hall.

"You will at least permit me to get a carriage to take you home?" he said. "Do not refuse. Sitting by your side for a few brief moments will be a great consolation to me."

In silence they rode through the sunlit streets together, and in silence he handed her out of the coach and turned away, Lillian to take up her weary burden again, toiling for a meager pittance, Royal Montague to fulfill the vows that weighed him down like chains. For both of them the present was full of misery and the future all dark.

He felt like a traitor when he found himself in the parlor of Rose's home that evening, awaiting her coming. He would certainly have stayed away if he had not promised her that he would surely be with her that evening.

She came into the parlor a vision of dazzling loveliness, greeting him in her usual caressing fashion; and the love in her face might have melted a heart of marble.

Rose Hall's glorious face and dark, radiant eyes, as they fell upon her lover's face, would have immortalized an artist if he could have transferred them to canvas. Love literally transfigured her.

The soft crimson glow of the chandelier fell upon a startingly lovely picture; yet Royal Montague's eyes never brightened as they rested upon it.

A prince might have been proud to woo and win beautiful Rose Hall, with her wondrous dower of beauty, for his bride. She would have charmed any man with her divine loveliness. Perhaps, out of the whole wide world, this man who was to marry her was the only one who could have looked upon her without emotion.

A sense of the cruel wrong that a loveless marriage would be to her came over Royal; but it could not be helped. He well knew that, if he were to tell her the

truth, she would either fall dead at his feet or go mad. No, he dare not tell her. He had often heard and read of the idolatrous love of women, but surely there never was such a fatal, unfortunate, pathetic love as that which filled the heart of beautiful Rose Hall.

CHAPTER XV.

With a heavy heart Lillian took up the tangled thread of life; with a weariness of spirit too great for words.

Royal Montague was gone—he had passed out of her life forever; nothing could pain her after that.

She went on with her work patiently as ever—but her fair face had lost its bloom; the beautiful blue eyes were losing their light.

Even Hulda Martin noticed how the girl was failing.

Lillian had told her aunt that Mr. Montague had bidden her farewell—that he was going away; but what else he had said was buried in her own sore troubled heart.

Dainty ladies who paid fabulous prices at one of the great art emporiums for the decorated fans that passed through Lillian's fingers, never dreamed of the sad face that had bent over the golden cupids among the passion roses, and that bitter tears were wept over them.

In this world trouble seldom comes singly. Hulda Martin's health had long since been failing, and Lillian's slender earnings barely kept the gaunt hand of want from the door after the doctor's bills were paid.

One day matters came to a climax; while Lillian sat at her work and while the sun shone into the meagerly

furnished rooms, fallingly lovingly upon the golden locks of one and the snow-white hair of the other, Hulda Martin passed quietly away; and with her died all knowledge of Rose's whereabouts, for in her anger she had destroyed every trace by which she could be found.

She died as she had lived—with the name of Rose upon her lips; Rose whom she had always loved best, despite Lillian's heroic devotion, but even in death she could not forgive the girl who had deserted her for wealth and power.

To describe poor Lillian's heart-rending grief when she raised her head to speak to her aunt, and realized what the gray pallor on that loved face meant is too pitiful.

How she wept over her, kissing the death-cold hands, crying out that Heaven could not have been so cruel to her as to take away the only being who loved her, leaving her alone and friendless in the great, harsh pitiless world.

It was well that she sunk down in utter unconsciousness, and that her wandering senses did not return to her as she tossed upon a bed of delirium, until a week after all that was left of poor Hulda Martin had been laid to rest.

The irate landlady's anger at this state of affairs knew no bounds.

"Goodness gracious!" she cried, poking through her tenants' trunks to see if there was anything valuable in them; "it was bad enough to have that woman die and cheat me out of a month's rent without that girl falling sick on my hands. Dear me, it will be a lesson to me never to take in lone women again!"

She heard a slight sound, and turning hastily about with arms akimbo, beheld Lillian standing in the doorway.

"Mrs. McDermot!" cried the girl aghast; "what are you doing?"

The woman's face turned a dull red.

"I'm looking to see what you've got that's worth selling to pay my rent with, and all that I can find is a coral necklace set with a rose-pearl at the clasp."

In a moment Lillian had sprung across the room and flung herself on her knees before the irate woman.

"Oh, do not touch that!" she cried: "it is all that I have left that once belonged to a loved and lost sister. Oh, dear madam, I pray you, I beseech you to give it back to me; it once belonged to my darling Rose. A hundred times I have seen it around her beautiful neck she has held it in her dear hands—gold could not buy it from me, I prize it so!"

"Gold will buy it from me," retorted the stolid woman, grimly. "Do you see that red flag out of the window? If you don't know what it means, I will tell you. It means that within an hour your whole belongings are to be auctioned off to pay me the month's rent you and your aunt owe me, and I reckon they won't fetch half the amount."

Lillian's face paled to a dead white. Sell the chair her aunt had loved, had sat in, and had died in! Sell the few little articles they had brought from the old lighthouse home, and which she held so dear? Oh, no, no, no!

"Beggars can't be choosers," went on the hard-hearted woman; "you're lucky to be allowed to keep on

the clothes you're wearing, together with that cloak and fine hat of yours."

"Let me keep the necklace, and you can have all the rest," sobbed Lillian; "it would break my heart to part with that."

A harsh, coarse laugh answered her as the woman slipped the coral necklace into the depths of her pocket.

"My claim comes in first, you'll find," she said. "If you can raise the money to pay me before the auctioneer commences, all well and good; if not, don't grumble. I'll leave you to your own reflections until then; and she left the room, closing the door after her with a resounding bang.

Lillian flung herself down by the open window, weeping the bitterest tears that ever fell from a girl's eyes.

She had been such a good, dutiful girl all her life—ah! why had Heaven shut her out from its mercy?

At that moment a grand coach rolled leisurely up the street, its trappings of burnished gold glittering in the morning sunlight. Its occupant, robed in costly silk and fine white lace, leaned back among her crimson-satin cushions with a contented smile.

What was it that broke in upon her rosy day-dreams? It sounded strangely like the cry of a woman in keen distress. Rose Hall looked anxiously about her. She saw the open window from which the ominous red flag protruded, and it seemed to be in that direction from which the pitiful moans proceeded.

"James," exclaimed the beauty imperiously, "I thought I heard the sound of weeping; draw up to the curb-stone and learn the cause, if you can."

The coachman laughed, and nodded toward the red banner waving in the breeze.

"I guess that's the cause of it," he said.

Rose Hall looked at him haughtily.

"I did not ask your opinion in the matter; I said 'Go and learn the cause, if you can.'"

The man jumped down from his box and disappeared within the doorway. A few moments later he returned.

"It's just as I told you, miss. There's to be an auction—a landlady is going to sell a young girl's belongings because she can't pay her rent."

The beautiful face of Rose Hall looked thoughtful.

"Did you find out how much the amount was, James?"

"Yes, miss—twenty dollars, the landlady said."

The heart of beautiful, impulsive Rose Hall was touched to think there should be sorrow in this beautiful world for the sake of twenty dollars. Why, the very rug beneath her feet cost ten times that amount; the fan that lay by her side, double that sum!

She drew forth her purse at once and counted out five crisp twenty-dollar notes.

"Hand that to the young girl," she said. "Tell her if she needs work she can call at No.—Lexington Avenue. We can surely find some employment for her."

The man executed his errand quickly, mounted his box, and was soon proceeding on his way to Central Park.

Rose leaned back among the cushions, contrasting her lot with that of other girls. Ah, how happy she was! Heaven had given her the desire of her heart—the love that was more to her than life itself.

As she rode along the sunlit streets, she quite forgot

the little incident of the girl she had befriended. The chances were she would never have thought of it again if it had not been brought back to her memory in a strange manner.

Meanwhile Lillian sat dumb and stupefied at the strange move on the chess-board of fate.

She had paid the amazed landlady; the terrible flag had been taken down, and the coral necklace had been returned to her.

"Of course, dearie, I intended to return the necklace to you all the time," declared Mrs. McDermot, flushing guiltily. "A keepsake's a keepsake, and I know what store people do set by 'em; and I'd like right well to have you stay and keep these rooms, Miss Lillian," she went on, in that tone of cajoling flattery which is so offensive, "for if I do say it to your face, I never had a tenant that I took to as I did to you."

"I may stay for the present, Mrs. McDermot," said Lillian, drearily.

The woman's face was beaming with smiles.

"It'll be like home to you, dearie. I'll come and sit by you while you color your fans with the red roses. By the way, I guess I'll get you a good warm dinner now. You look kind of faint."

"I shall be glad if you would do so," replied Lillian. "I will pay you what you think is right for it."

"*Pay me!*" reiterated Mrs. McDermot, in a high key. "Do you think I'd accept money for doing you a trifling favor like that? I'm only too glad to serve you. If you want anything that I can get for you, dearie, don't be afraid to call on me for it."

And she bustled out of Lillian's room, her broad, florid face wreathed in smiles. She was mentally cal-

culating how long the remaining eighty dollars would be likely to last the girl.

Ah, well, there are a good many Mrs. McDermot's in this world of ours. That was the first real glimpse poor Lillian had of the power of gold.

Long after the woman had left her, Lillian sat alone with the bills in her lap.

"I can not accept this gift from the hands of a stranger," she told herself. She arose and resolutely tied on her modest straw hat. "I must return the remainder, and I shall never rest until I pay in full the amount I have been obliged to borrow."

She remembered the number the man had given her, and remembered the words he had uttered as he handed her the roll of bills: "This is from a young lady who wishes you well."

"I must see her," Lillian promised herself.

CHAPTER XVI.

Lillian soon found the street and number indicated, and with some little trepidation ascended the broad marble steps, and timidly rang the bell.

It was James who answered the summons. He stared in undisguised amazement when he found who it was that was standing there, and learned that she wished to see personally the young girl who had so generously befriended her that morning.

He shook his head stolidly.

"It wouldn't be of any use to try to see her now," he declared.

"I would not detain her five minutes," pleaded Lillian, in her sweet, clear voice.

Still he shook his head.

"The young lady is busy looking over her wedding finery," he said. "Not more than half an hour ago she told me: 'remember if any one calls to-day I am not "at home" to them, no matter who it is,' those are the exact words."

"I am so sorry," said Lillian, plaintively.

At that moment Rose Hall was passing through the corridor, and the words fell upon her ear.

What was there in that girlish voice that sent such a strange thrill through her heart? Involuntarily she paused.

"Who is it at the door, James? and what does she want?" asked Rose, as she gathered up her silken train in her slender, jeweled hand.

"It's the young girl you sent the money to this morning, she wants to see you, ma'am. I told her you wouldn't."

Rose cut short his remark with an impatient gesture.

"Show her into the drawing-room. I will see her directly."

The servant stared. He looked helplessly at the girl's thick walking boots, not altogether free from the dust of the pavement, then at the delicate Axminster carpet, muttering something about the servant's hall being a more fit place to show her into.

Miss Rose, however, had signified the desire that she be shown into the drawing-room. Therefore, into that spacious apartment he conducted her.

"What a beautiful home," thought the girl, glancing wistfully about her. "How happy any girl ought to be surrounded by such luxury."

Then it occurred to her that somewhere in the great

wide world, her sister Rose was enjoying just such comforts, and after all she could not blame beautiful willful Rose for yearning for the luxuries of wealth, in preference to the weary life they led at the old light-house.

Ah, how restful the beautiful shadowy room seemed, with its magnificent adornings, to poor tired Lillian.

She heard the rustle of a silken robe—the next moment the velvet hangings were pushed aside by a white jeweled hand, and Rose Hall swept into the drawing-room.

“You wished to see me, my good girl,” she said, crossing over to where the slender girlish figure sat. “What can I do for you?”

Lillian started to her feet with a low cry. At the first vibration of that proud, mellow voice, she had recognized Rose.

The shock of intense surprise and joy had been too much for Lillian, and with that low cry on her lips, she threw up her white hands and fell at her sister's feet in a deathly swoon.

Rose's recognition of Lillian had been almost instantaneous—with a piercing cry she sprung forward—a cry that brought the servants quickly to the scene.

“It is Lilly!” she cried, dashing the heavy curtains aside, and the warm, invigorating sunshine flooded the room, falling upon the sweet, white upturned face; and in an instant she had raised the slender form from the floor, covering the pallid face and golden hair with kisses and tears.

When Lillian opened her blue, wondering eyes, the first object they rested upon was Rose's beautiful, anxious face bent lovingly over her; her golden head

was pillowed upon Rose's breast, her arms clasped about her.

Mutual explanations speedily followed. Great was Rose's emotion when she learned that her Aunt Hulda was dead, that she had brought Lillian to New York, never telling her that she was so near her sister Rose, and that she had destroyed all clues by which Lillian might have traced and found her. Even in the hour of her death Rose knew that her aunt had not forgiven her, else she would have sent for her, knowing she was so near.

And, clasping Lillian still closer in her arms, she told her how she had written regularly home to them; but the letters, with money inclosed, that she had sent, were returned unopened, with the words written across the face of the envelope, "You are as one dead to us forevermore;" and, lastly, of the few lines that had come to her one day, the first and last Hulda ever wrote her, and which ran as follows:

"I write to tell you, Rose, that your Uncle Abel is no more. I have given up the lighthouse, and shall take Lillian away with me. It will not interest one who has deserted us to know where we go. The world is wide. We shall never meet again."

All Rose's efforts to trace them had been futile, and all hope that she would ever meet her stern, unforgiving aunt and her sister had begun to die.

There was one thing Rose dare not reveal even yet, and that was, the true reason that had caused her to fly so precipitately and in such abject terror from home. Even now she could not tell Lillian the story of that mad marriage that had so nearly wrecked her young

life, and how Heaven had delivered her from the fruits of her folly.

An hour later, when Rose led her timid, fair-haired sister to their proud old grandmother, explaining to her how pitifully she had been cast adrift on the world, and pleading with her to take Lillian to her heart and home, the grand old lady could not well refuse.

“You did not like my poor young mother, whose only fault was in loving your son, grandma,” said Lillian, humbly. “I look at you with her eyes, I speak to you with her voice, her face is reflected in mine. I can well understand that for that reason you will not try to love me. Yet for my father’s sake, if not for my own, I hope your heart may soften toward me a little, and in time you may think more kindly of her. It was God’s will that she should love him. God directs the love of human hearts; the will of mortals must bend to it.”

There came a day when Rose Hall remembered those words with a pang at her heart more bitter than death.

They settled it that Rose and Lillian should not be parted, and that henceforth Lillian should take up her residence with her grandmother.

Lillian might be all that was sweet and good, but the grand old lady told herself that she should always love Rose best.

Yet, after all, it might be as well that Lillian had come to her, for when Rose married Royal and went far away from her, her heart would indeed be lonely. Lillian would be a great comfort to her then. Thus it happened that Lillian never returned to Mrs. McDermot’s. She was to occupy Celia Derwent’s room for the present—Celia having preferred to remain at

Linden Villa, not caring to come to New York with Rose and her aunt to enjoy the usual festivities of the metropolis. The truth of the matter was, however, she could not endure remaining anywhere near the engaged lovers, Royal and Rose; she could not have answered for herself had she been obliged to look on and witness Rose's happiness.

"Lilly," said Rose, blushing hotly, when the two girls found themselves alone after their interview with Mrs. Hall, "when you are sufficiently rested I want you to come to my room. I—I have a secret to tell you, and some very beautiful things to show you."

Then it occurred to Lillian like a flash the words the servant had uttered at the door: "The young lady is looking over her wedding finery which has just arrived; she would not wish me to call her."

"Oh, Rose, dear," she cried, earnestly, taking the beautiful face in her white hands, and looking down into the glorious dark eyes, "I know what your secret is—you are going to be married!" And she told her how she had learned of it.

"Yes, I am going to be married, Lilly," said the girl, her voice thrilling with tenderness, "and the one whom I have chosen is a king among men! My heart went out to him from the moment we first met."

"How well you love this hero of yours, dear!" said unconscious Lillian, looking fondly into the face upturned to hers.

"Love him!" repeated Rose. "Ah, Lillian, you will never know how dearly I love him whose bride I am soon to be. My whole life is merged into his. Do you remember how Juliet suffered death for Romeo? I would do the same for my love. Waking or sleeping I

am always thinking of him, Lilly—even in crowds I see no other face; it smiles in my dreams, it shines down upon me from the blue sky, it looks up to me from laughing waters, it lies in the leaves of flowers I bend over, in the pages of books, in the light of the sun, in the beams of the moon; there is no spot in the wide world where I do not see it. If my love were to die, I would fall dead or go mad when the news reached me!”

Lillian looked at her beautiful sister with tears in her blue eyes.

“Oh, Rose, my darling,” she cried in distress, “is it well to love any one so much as that?”

Rose laid her beautiful head with its wealth of dark curls upon Lillian’s shoulder.

“You might stop the waves of the mighty ocean from rolling, bid the sun and stars not to shine, and all would be more easily done than my love could be changed or lessened!”

“There is one thing you have forgotten, Rose, darling,” said Lillian gently, “you have not told me your lover’s name.”

CHAPTER XVII.

Rose leaned her beautiful dark head on Lillian’s shoulder, and smiled as her sister repeated with eager curiosity:

“You have forgotten to tell me your lover’s name, Rose.”

If Rose had but answered “Royal Montague,” a most pitiful tragedy would have been averted; fate itself must have dictated her answer.

“I shall neither tell you his name nor describe him

to you, Lillian. We are to have a *musicale* this evening, he is among the invited guests that will be present. I want to see if your keen intuition will select from among them the one to whom I have given my heart."

Lillian drew back in dismay.

"I shall not come down to your *musicale*, Rose, dear. I know so little of social life and its requirements, you—you—you would be ashamed of me. I should be like a field daisy among a conservatory of gorgeous tropical blooms—no, no—I will not be present."

Rose laughed gayly.

"Be natural, dear, and you will be simply perfect," she said; "besides, I am very anxious to present my fair-haired sister to my friends."

In vain Lillian protested. Rose was firm.

"You may meet your fate this evening, Lilly, it would not be right to shut yourself up in your room and miss the pleasures of mingling in a gay and brilliant throng. Despite your extreme shyness, I predict you will be a great favorite with the young gentlemen—you will have many admirers."

"Don't Rose, don't!" cried Lillian, faintly. "I can not bear it."

Rose looked at the white face upraised to her own, in wonder, she quite believed it was Lillian's timidity that prompted the words.

A sudden impulse came to Lillian to tell Rose of that sad dream of love that had flitted like a meteor over her path only to leave it more desolate than before, but the impulse died away and the words were left unspoken. There was no need to cloud Rose's beautiful face with sadness by the recital of that love story, that had such a sad, sad ending.

Lillian quite made up her mind to never mention the name of Royal Montague. That would certainly be the most effectual way of lessening the pain the remembrance of him gave her.

Rose wrote a hurried little note to Royal that afternoon, closing with these words:

"Come early this evening, dear, fully an hour in advance of the other guests. I have a charming surprise in store for you."

Rose was looking her best when Royal presented himself that evening; she welcomed him in a manner that would have been delightfully pleasing to a less cold-hearted lover.

"I shall not introduce him to Lillian in the usual way," she thought, with a mischievous smile; "her meeting with her future brother-in-law must be more romantic."

She had seen Lillian pass into the drawing-room half an hour before, and she knew she would be sure to be found in her favorite nook—among the flowers in the bay-window.

"Royal," she said, looking up into his face with twinkling eyes, "why do you not ask me what the surprise is I have in store for you? You don't seem particularly interested in it," she pouted.

"I have been more than anxious to know, but refrained from appearing inquisitive," replied Royal, carelessly.

"It is a rare and beautiful lily," she answered, looking up at him demurely; "it is in the drawing-room window. Come, we will admire its fairness together."

They were moving across the corridor in the direction of the drawing-room, and at that eventful moment

a servant came for Miss Rose with the message that she was wanted immediately in Mrs. Hall's *boudoir*.

"Wait till I return," she said, dropping Royal's arm; but the moments passed, and she came not, and mechanically Royal entered the drawing-room alone, crossed the room to the bay-window, and, all unconscious of the terrible shock in store for him, carelessly lifted the crimson velvet hangings.

A fair-haired young girl sat in a large velvet chair by the window, her face buried in her little white hands.

What was there about that silent, white-robed, girlish figure that stirred the blood in his veins like wine, and caused his heart to beat with such great, startling throbs?

"I beg your pardon for this intrusion," said Royal. "I was unaware that any one was here."

The girl lifted her golden head with a low cry, and the white, mellow light of the chandelier fell full upon her death-like, agitated face.

"Royal!—Mr. Montague!" she gasped, in dismay.

"Lillian, my darling!" he cried, hoarsely; and, before she could divine his intention, and before he himself thought of the consequences, he had caught the girl in his arms, holding her close to his heart, covering her face, her hands, and her beautiful golden hair with yearning, passionate kisses.

The little white hands pushed him from her with quiet, firm dignity.

"You have forgotten our compact, Mr. Montague," she said, sadly, "and that was, if we ever met again it was to be as strangers. What are you doing here?"

The question brought him to his senses with a ter-

rible shock, as nothing else in the wide world would have done. Up to that moment, in the intense surprise of meeting her whom he loved so well and so hopelessly, he had quite forgotten that he was in Rose's home—Rose, whom he was so soon to wed!

He took the little white hands in his own with deep agitation.

"Before I answer you, tell me what *you* are doing here, Lillian? I did not even know that you knew Rose Hall."

A lovely smile broke over the fair girl's face. Suddenly it changed to the pallor of death, and there was an agony of fear in the blue eyes raised to his own. She remembered Rose had told her that her lover was coming an hour in advance of the other guests. Heaven be merciful! surely Royal Montague could not be he?

"What is Rose Hall to you, Royal?" she asked, in a whisper so low he barely caught it.

His answer was more cruel than death.

"Rose Hall is the one who has come between you and me Lillian—the girl whom I am fated to marry, but whom I can never love—the girl whom I am to give my name, but who can never possess my heart, for it has gone out to you, Lillian," he answered, bitterly; "but tell me, Lillian, what are you doing here, of all places in the world?"

"Rose's lover—you are Rose's lover!" moaned poor Lillian, with the bitterest, wailing cry that ever fell from human lips. "Heaven pity me! Heaven pity my beautiful hapless Rose! It is my beautiful, unfortunate Rose, then, who loves you so dearly she would die or go mad if she were to lose you," she

cried, incoherently, wringing her hands in the most pitiful anguish.

"Lillian!" cried Royal Montague, "what can your words mean? tell me, Lillian," he entreated, "what you are doing here in Rose Hall's home?"

He attempted to take her hand, but she shrank back from him. A low moan broke from her lips, and she fell back into his arms in a deadly swoon.

At that moment Rose came hurriedly into the drawing-room, and the sight that met her gaze, Lillian, lying in Royal Montague's arms in a dead faint, brought a cry of dismay to her lips. In an instant she had gained his side.

"What is the matter with Lilly?" she cried in alarm. "Oh, Royal, what is the matter with Lilly?"

"I invaded her retreat inadvertently, and frightened her, I fear," he answered, hating himself for the excuse he was obliged to offer. "Who is this young girl, Rose?" he asked, laying the still form down upon the divan, and giving her in charge of the house-keeper, who had been hastily summoned.

It was strange that the keen eyes of love did not notice the extreme pallor of his face, and how he bent over the couch where Lillian lay, even though he had no excuse to linger. It was strange that she did not notice the huskiness of the voice that asked the question:

"Who is this young girl?"

The answer that fell from Rose's lips was like the shock of doom to the unhappy young man.

"I meant to tell you before, that the lily we should find in the curtained recess of the bay-window, was

my sister Lillian, to whom I was about to introduce you."

"Your sister!"

If the words had been shrieked out trumpet-tongued upon the air, they could not have affected Royal Montague more. He reeled back as though he had been struck a heavy blow. He tried to speak, but the words froze on his lips.

He understood the cause of Lillian's emotions now, and why she had fainted when he had admitted that Rose claimed his love, and that she was his promised bride.

"You are surprised, Royal, to learn that I have a sister. I have never mentioned her to you before. Come into the conservatory and I will tell you about her."

Mechanically he followed her, and he listened, like one stricken dumb, to the story she told him of her sister Lillian and herself, and their life at the old light-house; how contented Lillian had been, but how she hated it and prayed for deliverance, for life in the great world beyond, for brightness and joy such as filled the lives of other girls, and how deliverance had come to her in the shape of her grandmother's visit, and the offer she had made to raise Lillian and herself from the depths of obscurity and poverty to dazzling wealth.

Sitting there among the gorgeous odorous blooms she told him all of her eventful story—all save one shadowed chapter, and that one she told herself she never would reveal—the dark mystery that enveloped that last week at her island home died with the death of Osric Lawrence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Never was a man caught in such a web by the machinations of fate as was Royal Montague.

He realized his exact position with a horror words are weak in portraying as he sat by Rose's side listening to her story.

She had told him how bitterly angry her Aunt Hulda Martin had been when she had told them she had decided to accept her grandmother's offer, and how her aunt had solemnly declared that she should be as one dead to them if she left home, and how Hulda Martin had carried out her threat when Abel died by taking Lillian away from their island home, carefully covering up all traces of where they had gone, even going so far as to insist upon Lillian being called by her name, and at her aunt's death how strangely Providence had thrown the two sisters together.

"It sounds like a romance, does it not, Royal?" she asked, clasping her white hands together on his arm, and looking up into his face with her dark, bright eyes. "You must love Lilly very dearly for my sake."

She never knew how the words tortured him.

"I should like to have Lilly come and live with us after we are married, Royal," she pursued, nestling closer to him. "I fear it would not be for long, however, for some fortunate lover would be sure to steal her away from us soon."

Royal Montague tore his arm almost rudely from the clasp of Rose's little white hand upon which his engagement ring glowed and burned like a star of fire. He could not endure even the mention that the

girl whom he loved better than his own life and whom he knew loved him should ever look with favor upon any lover. The thought maddened him almost beyond endurance. He felt now more keenly than ever how impossible it would be to tell Rose that he and Lillian had met before. How could he tell Rose that she had spoiled Lillian's life and wrecked his?

How could he endure playing the part of Rose's lover if Lillian stood near? He could never act such a living lie. Lillian's presence would drive him mad. He knew how much Lillian would suffer as well, and the complication of matters fairly alarmed him.

Royal Montague never spent a more miserable evening. Even his friends noticed how *distract* he was and rallied him upon it. Rose looked at him with grieved eyes. He had scarcely spoken to her the whole evening. His hands touched hers with no loving pressure, and he had the air of a man annoyed beyond endurance when by chance he found himself alone with her.

Lillian had not made her appearance again that evening, pleading a severe headache. In vain Royal watched for her coming.

"I must see her if but for a moment," he told himself, yet how he was to accomplish it he hardly knew.

Suddenly a brilliant idea occurred to him.

Stepping into the conservatory he gathered a small bunch of hyacinths, and tearing a leaf from his memorandum hastily penciled the following note:

"Lillian. I must see you in the conservatory before I leave. Come, if but for a moment, within half an hour. I shall watch and wait for you."

He slipped the note among the fragrant blossoms,

and calling one of the servants, bade him take the flowers at once to Miss Lillian, saying that he sincerely regretted being the cause of her indisposition, and that he hoped her pardon would be granted him.

No one thought strange of this floral offering from Miss Rose's lover to her sister Lillian, and no one would have dreamed of looking among the fragrant petals for any message secreted there.

Lillian took the flowers with trembling hands. She did not dare to order them returned, though it grieved her to the heart to accept them from him, whose every thought should have been given to Rose. Even though it broke her heart, she would not give one thought to him. She would pray Heaven to give her strength to give him up to Rose; she would have died rather than cause Rose one pang. She remembered her sister's words: "I love him so dearly, Lilly, that my life would be nothing without him."

Suddenly her hand came in contact with the bit of crumpled paper as she was putting the flowers from her. She smoothed it out and read its contents.

Should she see him or not? that was the question she asked herself over and over again. Then she decided that it would be best to grant the interview, that he might have the opportunity of telling him there must henceforth be no more appointments, no more interviews, between them.

Wrapping a dark mantel about her, that she might not be observed by the other guests, Lillian glided slowly down to the conservatory. If she saw any one, they would not think of questioning her.

Royal Montague, who had been watching for her,

saw the dark figure among the palms, and hastily made his way to her side.

“Lilly!” he said, gently touching one of the little white hands that lay upon the broad, green leaves. “Nay, you need not shrink from me, Lillian; I am not going to pain you by passionate words of love. I shall crush the impulse that bids me take you in my arms and fold you to my heart. I know all of your past, Lillian; Rose has told me; you are her sister. And now, I ask of you, what are we to do? Oh, Lillian,” he cried, “how am I to bear meeting you, seeing you daily, without showing what is in my heart?”

“Yet that is what must be done,” said Lillian gravely. “I would go away, but that would not mend matters; we should be obliged to meet often in the future; it could not be avoided; and we may as well school ourselves to it first as last. There must be no appointments, no more meetings, between us,” she went on hurriedly; “and I pray you, by the love you bear me, be kind to Rose. Let the past be a dead letter between us. We will take up our lives from to-night. Rose must never know,” she continued. “If she even suspected that you had ever loved another, the knowledge would kill her.”

Before he could frame a reply Lillian had flitted away. The next moment he realized why she had left him so suddenly—she had observed Rose approaching from the opposite end of the conservatory.

Rose soon discovered him standing among the magnolia blooms. His face did not flush as she came up to him. He did not turn his handsome head toward

her and offer to caress her although they were quite alone together.

"Royal," she said, laying her cool white hand on his, "why have you been away from the parlors so long? My guests are beginning to miss you. I have been searching for you for the last hour."

"So long as that?" he asked, with a guilty flush, "why it did not seem to me that I had been standing here five minutes."

She took the little hand quickly away that she had laid so caressingly on his and looked at him.

He was so completely absorbed in his own thoughts he never even noticed the action.

Was the strange fancy that had taken possession of her really true then? Was his heart growing cold toward her?

Once during the evening she had heard a remark that had not been intended for her ears. It had been uttered by the laughing, rosy lips of a young girl; but it had awakened a strange unrest in the heart of Rose Hall and puzzled her.

Two girls had been standing by a vase of exotics and while they were admiring them Royal Montague passed them.

The fair-haired blonde turned to her companion with a meaning smile, remarking slowly:

"Did you ever see a person change so strangely as Royal Montague has within the last few weeks? He does not look like a happy man, even when his *fiancée* is beside him. I should not fancy so cold a lover."

Rose had been standing near, conversing with a guest; yet, by chance, every syllable of the low-spoken

words reached her and opened her eyes to the existing state of affairs.

Was it possible that she had all the outward form of Royal's love, but not the reality? She would watch him carefully and see for herself if there was a shadow on his face which her presence would not chase away. She would make a study of it. She would watch other engaged lovers and see if Royal's actions differed from theirs.

She looked anxiously around the room. He was not there, neither was he in the drawing-room or library.

There was a puzzled look of wonder on her face when she glanced into the conservatory and found him there, looking so pale, dejected and miserable among the blooms.

Yes, they were quite right. The face upon which she gazed had certainly more of pain than pleasure stamped upon it. Was he ill or unhappy?

The evening passed at length. The guests took their leave, and, as was his usual custom, Royal lingered till the last. He tried to put as much warmth as possible into his parting with Rose. He felt like a traitor when he bent his head and mechanically kissed the dark, glowing face raised to his own as he said good-night.

Rose watched him out of sight, her beautiful dark eyes heavy with tears.

"Yes, he loves me," she murmured. "How foolish I am to doubt him. Some lovers are more demonstrative than others, that is all."

Slowly Rose quitted the brilliantly lighted parlor, going at once to Lillian's room, and pausing before

the door was startled at the sound of passionate weeping. She turned the knob gently and entered.

CHAPTER XIX.

Rose paused hesitatingly at the threshold of Lilly's room.

"It must have been my morbid imagination, fancying that I heard the sound of suppressed sobbing—it must have been the moaning of the wind among the trees," she told herself.

Lillian sat by the open window, her fair head supported by her white arms, which rested upon the broad sill. She looked wearily up as her lovely young sister entered the room.

"Oh, Lilly," she cried, flinging herself down upon the velvet hassock at her feet, and looking up into the sad blue eyes, "how stupid of me to expose you to such a fright as I did to-night. I meant your meeting with Royal to be very romantic. I told him I had a beautiful lily to show him in the alcove of the drawing-room. At that moment I was suddenly called away. I can understand how his sudden appearance before you must have frightened you, and you fainted. He quite supposed I had intended to show him a calla lily. My little joke had a very stupid ending, for Royal has not been himself all evening."

"I was only a little nervous," confessed Lillian, confusedly. "I—I should not have allowed myself to become so startled at the sudden appearance of—"

Rose put her hand over Lillian's lips.

"I hope you are not going to finish your sentence by calling Royal a stranger. But, now that you have seen my lover, tell me what you think of him. Is

he not as handsome as a prince? Is he not the noblest man you have ever met, Lilly?—a king among men, whom any girl might have been proud to win?”

The dark, bright eyes were looking into her own so intently; how should she answer her? Lillian was distressed beyond measure.

“You forget that I had but a glimpse of your hero in the drawing-room,” she stammered, and the sound of her voice was unnatural and constrained.

“Tell me one thing, Lilly: even in that glimpse you had of him, were you pleased with my choice?”

“I am always pleased with any one you love, Rose,” was the evasive reply, as she clasped her lovely sister in her arms, and covered her face with passionate kisses and tears.

“I do not know, Lilly, which of you love me better—you or Royal.”

“Heaven help her!” thought Lillian, in the keenest distress. Rose loved him so well, while every throb of his heart was for another. Not for worlds would she have Rose ever suspect it.

Fair, gentle Lillian was no tragedy queen. With her, to lose her lover was to bow to the decree of Heaven, praying for strength to bear it. Her life might be spoiled, her hopes wrecked, but she would live on and never complain; no matter how her heart was wrung, she would suffer in silence.

With beautiful, passionate Rose the loss of her lover would mean death.

An hour or more the two lovely sisters sat together in the moonlight, Rose discussing, with eager, girlish abandon, her approaching marriage, and where Royal was to take her on their bridal tour to spend the

honey-moon, little dreaming that each word she uttered was like the thrust of a sharp sword to the pale, silent girl who sat by her side.

That night, when Lillian had found herself alone, the hopeless, miserable girl fell upon her knees, hiding her white face in her trembling hands. "How am I to bear it?" she cried. "How can I live through it?" The future would be a trying ordeal to her, but she must not shrink from facing it, she told herself.

Early the next afternoon Rose's lover presented himself at her home. How his heart beat as he was shown into the drawing-room!

He heard Rose's gay, laughing voice outside on the terrace. "Was Lillian with her?" he wondered.

Mrs. Hall sat before the open French window. She looked up with a smile as Royal entered. Holding out her jeweled hand to him, "I am glad to see you, Royal," she said, in pleased surprise. "It is not often that you favor us with an afternoon call. The girls will be in presently."

The grand old lady languidly touched a silver bell beside her; and the servant who answered it was dispatched at once in search of the young ladies.

Royal walked over to the window. He longed to quit the room; he felt he could not meet his lost love then and there.

His thoughts were of Lillian, the girl from whom he had parted, yet whom fate had placed again in his path when he was striving so manfully to forget her. Great Heaven! how he must have loved her! His heart was beating so quickly that he could hardly breathe; a very fever of expectation ran hot in his

veins; a mist of tears spread before his eyes and shut out the whole world from him.

Presently he heard the sound of approaching footsteps. Never did a man utter a more vehement, passionate prayer for strength and calmness than he.

The light, dancing footsteps drew nearer, Rose pushed aside the lace draperies of the long French window and entered, closely followed by another figure, and he knew he was in the presence of both sisters.

He had a confused remembrance afterward of Rose's tender greeting. "Royal," she said, leading her sister up to him, "I want to introduce you to my sister Lillian."

With a desperate effort he raised his head, murmuring a few inarticulate words, and looked at the two beautiful girls standing before him—first at her whom he had loved and lost—fair, golden haired Lillian, at whose feet he would have laid his life—the only girl who had ever stirred his soul with the fire and fever and ecstasy of passionate love.

Her eyes did not meet his; no word fell from her lips. She acknowledged the introduction by a simple graceful bow.

Then his eyes wandered to the face of the brilliant, beautiful girl by her side, who was looking up at him with the light of love in her proud dark eyes.

"You two, whom I love so well, shall not greet each other so formally," Rose declared, with a merry, happy laugh, and before either of them had time to divine her intention she had clasped their hands together.

Royal bowed and turned away, not daring to look

upon Lillian's face until he had regained his composure. It was a trying ordeal for both of them.

Lillian crossed to the other side of the room and sat down by Mrs. Hall, leaving Rose and Royal standing by the lace-draped window together.

"They are very happy lovers, are they not, my dear?" whispered Mrs. Hall, with a pleased smile. "It is so pleasant to see a regular love-match. Do you notice how fond Rose is of her handsome lover? And no wonder!"

Lillian's eyes turned slowly in their direction. She saw nothing but the tall, dark figure turned from the light.

Rose had been talking to him in her gay, charming fashion.

"Royal," she said, at length, "what are you looking at so intently? I am sure you can see nothing from the window; it is quite dark."

Then he spoke and the sound of his voice pierced Lillian's heart with pain, it was freighted with such despair.

"I was looking at nothing in particular, Rose. I was merely thinking."

"You seem to be given to fits of abstraction of late," declared Rose, pouting her pretty crimson lips, "and I do not like it."

She was a little disappointed, too, that Royal had not been a little warmer in his manner toward Lillian.

At last the dinner-bell rang, and it was quite a relief to Lillian to escape from the drawing-room.

At the table, Royal spoke to her sister but seldom, and it was always with averted eyes, Rose noticed.

"He does not like fair-haired girls," thought Rose,

regretfully. "No doubt he would have been better pleased with Lilly if she had been dark like I am."

At the moment that thought was in Rose's mind Royal Montague was saying to himself:

"How many hours of this torture will there be to pass, I wonder? What, in Heaven's name, shall I do with my life, if I find one day so hard to bear?"

Once he met the calm glance of Lillian's blue eyes, and the cup he held in his hand nearly fell from his grasp. The blood ran like fire through his veins; every nerve and pulse thrilled with the sense of her presence; yet he must sit there as the happy lover of Rose—smile, talk, and jest unconcernedly, while his heart sank in his bosom.

He did not know that life could hold such torture.

After tea there was music in the parlor; friends dropped in, and they had quite a little impromptu party, but through the evening Royal and Lillian seemed to avoid each other more than ever.

"It is a pity that Royal and Lillian seem to have taken such a decided dislike to each other," thought Rose, watching them wonderingly. How little she dreamed that at that moment Royal was trying to trample down the mad impulse to go over to where Lillian sat and implore her to fly with him, and not to wreck both of their lives in this mad fashion. For he would not give her up—he could not.

CHAPTER XX.

The days flew quickly by; Lillian, who by her grandmother's request had assumed the family name of Hall again, had been quite a month in her new home.

Royal and Lillian met constantly, yet there was an imperceptible something in their manner toward each other, a mutual avoidance, that must have struck any one who watched them keenly.

It was seldom, either in conversation or in the exchange of common courtesies that Lillian raised her eyes to Royal's face; their hands never touched even in most common greeting; a formal bow was the most that passed between them.

In conforming to this line of conduct they were wise; they had cared far too much for each other; had loved each other too well to allow of any intimate friendship. Both of them understood that it was much easier to fly from temptation than it was to encounter it.

There was no middle course for them, and they knew it.

Never was there a more patient, generous rival than Lillian. All the repressed love of her nature she showered upon beautiful, capricious Rose.

No matter what she suffered, it was like balm to her soul to know that her darling Rose was happy.

"He will learn to love Rose in time," she thought, "for a great love will always win love sooner or later in return!"

She watched with wistful, yearning tenderness, the smiles that rippled over Rose's bonny, beautiful face: she was pleased when people spoke of her as being superbly lovely; few thought of her save to notice how pale and thin she was growing. One morning Rose and Lillian were together in the library when Royal entered. Lillian was busy writing letters. Rose, restless as a butterfly, sat in a great cushioned arm-

chair with a book in her hand, but the dark dreamy eyes were not resting on the page before her; she was indulging in rosy day-dreams of the future.

"I am so glad you are come, Royal," she said brightly. "I am finding it so dull this beautiful sunshiny morning; Lillian is anything but companionable, and sitting here listening to the scratch, scratch, scratching of her pen on the paper, is anything but enlivening."

Royal murmured some unintelligible reply, and at that moment one of the servants put her head in at the door asking if Miss Rose would please see the florist a moment; he had called to consult her personally in reference to the flowers she had ordered for the ball that evening.

"I should like to consult your taste, Royal, in the flowers I am to wear," said Rose, pausing before her lover's chair; "of all the odorous blooms, which are your choice—roses, pansies, hyacinths, carnations?"

"Lilies are my choice," he said absently.

"Then lilies it shall be," declared Rose, dancing out of the room with a gay laugh. "I shall dress like a water-nymph in pale sea-green, with water-lilies binding up my long, dark hair," she said, tripping joyously away.

Royal Montague and Lillian Hall were alone together for the first time. Lillian never raised her head, she went on writing rapidly, hoping, praying in her heart that he would not speak to her.

Silently Royal Montague sat watching her, the contour of the golden head, the beautiful, slender white hands as they rested on the half-written page, the

white lids and golden lashes that hid the blue eyes from his sight.

Ah, if for once—if only for once he could go and kneel before her; if he could but lavish on her the love that filled his heart—if he might for just a few moments talk to her on the old terms! Then he reproached himself for being weak.

The lovely golden head was bent in graceful dignity, which could never be bridged over, over her letter. The moments lengthened themselves into half a hour, yet Lillian never raised her head, she never once glanced toward the end of the room where Royal sat.

An amused, saucy laugh from the door-way aroused both of them. Royal turned abruptly around in his chair and Lillian glanced up from her letter.

It was Rose; she stood in the door-way looking from one to the other in merry amusement.

“I have been standing here for some time watching you two,” she said, “and I declare neither of you moved. I do not believe you have exchanged one word since I left you.”

“I am quite sure we have not,” admitted Royal; “your sister Lillian has been writing. I assure you that I was silent simply because I was afraid of disturbing her. If she had shown the least desire to talk I should have been very pleased.”

“I quite appreciated your silence, Mr. Montague,” returned Lillian, with great dignity. “I was in haste to finish my letter in time for the morning mail,” and rising calmly, she quitted the room, and all the light and sunshine of the summer day seemed to Royal Montague to go with her.

That afternoon when Lillian sat alone in her own room, Rose entered silently behind her, and a moment later two white arms stole round her neck, and a pair of rosy lips were pressed to her own.

"Lilly," she cried, "I have come to give you a little scolding which you deserve very much."

"You must contrive to look a little less smiling, then, if I am to remember that it is really a scolding, Rose," she said, laying down the bit of embroidery she held in her hands, and gazing into the lovely, laughing, dimpled face bent over her.

"It is about Royal," said Rose, hesitatingly. Lillian gave a violent start, her face flushed crimson, then died away leaving it paler than before. "Yes, it was about Royal," repeated Rose. "Do you know that you sat in the same room half an hour to-day, yet you never spoke one word to him? I have come to plead with you, Lilly, to be a little kinder to him, even though you do not like him, for my sake. Say to yourself, when you meet him, 'I must try to be more pleasant to him because Rose loves him so dearly, and it is great pain to her to know that we are not better friends.' You are a sunbeam to me, Lilly, dear, but you are like an icicle to poor Royal!"

Lillian's lips paled strangely as she listened. She caught Rose in her arms with a passionate cry, and pushing the dark hair back from her brow, gazed long and wistfully into her lovely upturned face. "Ah, if she but knew all," she thought.

A light that was wonderful to see came into her pale, noble face.

"It did not occur to me that I was wanting in courtesy toward Mr. Montague, Rose," she said earnestly.

“When we meet in future I will try to remember he is to be your future husband, and that I must be pleasanter to him.”

“It must have been only my fancy that you disliked him, Lilly. I have accounted for your actions at last. You are only shy and timid when in company with gentlemen.”

To Rose that seemed the solution of all the mystery that had puzzled her so in the past.

The next evening, the two lovely sisters, Rose and Lillian Hall, made quite a sensation at the fashionable ball at Waverly Villa. Both were dressed in simple white without jewel or ornament. Lillian carried a bouquet of white hyacinths in her hand, while Rose carried a bouquet of simple pond lilies. The effect the two sisters produced as they entered the ball-room was marvelous. From that moment simplicity in dress became the rage of the season—a very trying prank of fickle Fashion for young widows who were trying their best, in laces, furbelows, and jewels, to appear sweet twenty, and for ancient bellies to appear younger still.

It was Lillian's first ball, and Rose meant that she should enjoy it. The sisters were standing together beneath an arch of palms and twining ivy leaves when Royal came to claim Rose's hand for the first waltz.

Royal gazed earnestly at the two young girls as he slowly approached them—the one so dark, dazzling, and exquisitely piquant; the other fair as an angel, in her delicate, pale beauty, the soft light of the chandelier falling upon her golden hair. They were rightly named Rose and Lilly.

How strange it was, he thought, that both of these lovely girl should care for him!

"Royal," said Rose, as he gained her side, "I have given this waltz to Captain Dent; you were too long in concluding to ask me. I wish Lilly to dance," she added, brightly, "and I can find her no better partner in the room than yourself."

There could be but one reply. Royal bowed low before Lillian.

"I shall be delighted, Miss Hall, if you will honor me," he said.

There were so many people standing in groups around them that Lillian could frame no excuse for refusing him. She laid her hand lightly on his arm, the bewildering dance-music struck up, and they whirled away together.

When they reached the other end of the ball-room, Lillian stopped short and said, huskily:

"I can not finish this dance with you, Mr. Montague; please lead me to a seat and leave me by myself."

His longing was intense; he would have given anything to have once more placed his arm round the graceful figure.

His heart was beating fast, but the quiet light in her calm blue eyes and the grave tone of her voice steadied him.

She could not bear that the arms that had been thrown around her in passionate sorrow and pain should clasp her in a dance.

"It shall be as you wish, Lillian," he said, hoarsely; "but, if you will not dance, will you walk with me

through the moon-lit grounds? Give me at least five minutes, Lillian."

"Do not tempt me, Royal," she said; "strangers are not more cold than we must be to each other."

Royal Montague bent his handsome head lower over the golden one. At that moment Rose approached them quite unperceived.

Was it fancy? It seemed to Rose that Royal suddenly drew back from Lillian. Was it fancy? She thought she heard the words, in a low, quivering voice, "I can not bear it, my darling!"

"The lights and the music have turned my brain," she thought, smiling at the absurd idea that had entered her head.

CHAPTER XXI.

Rose's wedding-day, which had been set for the twentieth of October, was rapidly drawing nigh; it wanted but three days now to the celebration of that event, which was to take place at Linden Villa. Decorations had been going on for at least a month, and nothing was wanting to make the affair a brilliant one.

Lillian and Royal Montague avoided each other more than ever now; each had succumbed to the inevitable, and sacrificed themselves upon the altar of duty. Even in the moments of his darkest despair, Royal Montague could not find it in his heart to wish that he and Rose had never met. Her great, worshipful love had won from him the profoundest pity and devotion.

He had asked her to marry him on the impulse of the moment, and now, even though he had met one

whom he could have loved better, he must not complain. He loved Lillian with all the strength of his heart, but he could not quite dislike Rose, even though she had come between them. There was a subtle charm about Rose that always endeared her to the hearts of those with whom she was brought in contact; impulsive, gay, piquant, few could help adoring her.

Rose Hall's wedding day dawned bright and clear; no cloud was in the blue sky, no shadow darkened the golden sunlight.

A gay party had been invited to Linden Villa to witness the ceremony, and already the guests were beginning to gather. The gardens were literally packed with rosebuds of girls in fluttering white dresses, and floating ribbons and laces.

Rose Hall looked upon the brilliant throng from her lace-draped window with a happy smile.

"My wedding-day!" she murmured. "I wonder if all brides feel as happy as I?"

Suddenly a memory of the past swept over her with an awful shock. She had almost forgotten that short week that had so nearly wrecked her youth; it had almost seemed like a dream to her, that chapter of her early life, with one of the pages turned down.

Was she the same girl who had lived such a dreary monotonous life of it in the old light-house by the moaning sea, longing and praying with all her heart for something to happen to change the terrible dullness of her existence?

No wonder she had fallen in love with the handsome stranger—the first young man who had ever crossed her lonely path; no wonder she listened to him when

he poured into her willing ear the tale of love so like the story of Romeo and Juliet; no wonder she had mistaken simple liking for the beautiful dream called love. She had been so young and guileless, no wonder he succeeded by his brilliant, eloquent arguments in persuading her to marry him. As she stood by the lace-draped window in the sunlight, her mind reverted to the dim, dark old church, and the shadowy altar, and handsome man standing by her side, who clasped her hand, whispering to her to be courageous, for she was soon to be his darling little bride.

She remembered, with a thrill of horror, that homeward trip on the starlit water—how Osric Lawrence, her wedded husband, had kissed her, and parted from her on the white sands, bidding her wait there for him, at her old home, until he returned.

A cry broke from her white lips as she thought of it. How merciful Heaven had been to her in never letting him return! What should she have done if he had lived to claim her? How she loathed his very memory! It was a horrible thought to her that, at least in name, she had been the bride of a forger.

No one knew of it—no one would ever know. True, it was recorded in the register of the dim old church, but no human eye that would be likely to recognize her name would ever rest upon it. She was secure enough in that.

How strange it was that her thoughts should revert to Osric Lawrence and that dark past on her wedding-day!

She looked into the long French mirror, and was startled at the white face and somber dark eyes that were reflected there.

"I fear I shall be a pale bride," she thought to herself, "and Royal would not like that."

Her meditations were cut short by a quick tap at the door. It was Lillian.

"Would you not like to come down and take a peep at the decorations in advance of the guests, dear?" she asked, caressing the dark curly head that was laid against her shoulder. "The florist who designed them met with a serious accident while arranging them—he missed his footing from a step-ladder and fell. His place has been supplied by a very clever young man, who has excellent taste and displays wonderful ingenuity, they tell me. I am going to see and judge for myself very soon. You might like to make a few suggestions here and there. You had better go down and see if you are pleased with everything, Rose, dear," said her sister as she kissed the lovely face, then turned and left the room.

In the grand drawing-room, the magnificent decorations which would have been completed long since had the work not be retarded by the accident, under the skillful fingers of the stranger were fast nearing completion.

He kept on busily with his work, heedless of the efforts of the simpering housemaid, who stood by him with twine and scissors, doing her best to engage him in conversation.

He smiled a cynical smile and compressed his bearded lips tightly as he carelessly twined the laurel leaves and sweet white roses together into a true-love knot.

A vague sort of wonder filled him as to what kind of

a bride would stand beneath it—would she be fair, or dark, like one whom he had once known?

“Marriage was a farce, and the flame called love was a mockery!” he told himself, “for women were as false as they were fair!”

Then it occurred to him that he did not even know the name of the occupants whose home he was decorating, and an idle curiosity came to him to inquire the names of the contracting parties.

The loquacious maid was only too pleased to find that the “smart young man had found his tongue at last,” as she afterward expressed it.

“Linden Villa is a very fine place,” he observed at length. “I should like to live here.”

“Why don’t you apply for the gardener’s place?—he’s going to leave next week. It’s awfully lively here; I’m sure you would like it,” and she dropped her eyes with a simpering giggle.

The bearded stranger flushed, and he looked at his white hands with a cynical laugh.

“I would not care about such employment,” he said, with a contemptuous sneer; “it’s not to my liking.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” she retorted with an impertinent toss of her yellow braids; “that’s what most of us would like; to dress fine and be ladies and gentlemen of leisure; but when our pocket says ‘no,’ we have to buckle to. But I needn’t have been out to service unless I wanted to,” she went on with another simpering giggle; “there was a right smart young grocer wanted me, but I wouldn’t have him, oh, dear no! And then there was an old bachelor who was just crazy for me to be Mrs. Doane; but I sent him about his business quick; says I, ‘I thank you very kind, sir, but do you

think I'd be fool enough to marry a man as old as my grandfather?' No, I guess not; when I marry I want a handsome young man, or——"

Not one word of the girl's chatter had been heard by the stranger, his thoughts were elsewhere, and he cut short her remarks by asking abruptly:

"Who lives here?"

"A grand old lady who has more gold than she knows what to do with; she's a widow, but she's as old as the hills!"

"What is her name? it matters little to me whether she be 'maid, wife, or widow,'" he answered impatiently.

"Her name is Mrs. Hall," returned the girl; "it's her granddaughter that is going to be married to-day!"

"Hall!" exclaimed the man, dropping the rosewreath he held in his hand, his face white with intense emotion; "did I understand you to say Hall or Hill?"

"I said H-a-l-l, in as plain English as I could speak," returned the girl, spelling out the name a second time.

He drew a step nearer the girl, his features working convulsively, his eyes fairly blazing like purple gleaming fires, his breath coming in quick, short gasps that almost scorched her cheek as he bent nearer her.

"You say it is this lady's granddaughter who is to be married to-day? is she young and beautiful—gloriously beautiful, and is her name—Rose?" he gasped. "Do they call her Rose Hall?"

"Goodness gracious me! why don't you ask me one question at a time?" replied the maid; "she's pretty, yes, and no wonder; any one could be pretty dressed

in fine silks and all that—fine feathers make fine birds, you know.”

“But her name—tell me quick, do they call her Rose? Rose Hall? In Heaven’s name answer me, I say!”

“You seem to take a wonderful interest in her anyhow,” sneered the girl, “but I’ll set your heart at rest by telling you I don’t know what her name is. I’ve only been here a week, and I’ve always heard ’em call her Miss Hall; it seems to me I have heard some one say she was named after a flower; and I said to myself: ‘dear me, what ridiculous names rich folks do give their children; they’re—’”

Again the stranger cut her remarks short, and there was a glitter in his flashing eye, and a pallor on his face that quite frightened the girl.

“I want to ask a great favor of you,” he said hoarsely, drawing a silver dollar from his pocket and placing it in her hand; “I want you to go to Miss Hall’s room and tell her a gentleman wishes to see her in the drawing-room, and in Heaven’s name to come quickly. Will you do it, my good girl?”

“Yes,” she answered; “but what name, please?”

“Never mind the name,” he answered abruptly; “tell her she must see me!”

CHAPTER XXII.

“Tell Miss Hall I *must* see her,” repeated the stranger, vehemently. “I will wait here for her.”

When the girl had quitted the room and he found himself alone, he turned to the pier-glass quivering with excitement.

“Is it Rose who was to have been wed to-day?” he asked himself, clinching his hands together fiercely.

"Could she so far have forgotten me as to marry again?"

Would she recognize him? he wondered; would those keen, dark eyes pierce the disguise he had so cleverly assumed, that even those who had known him best passed him by, never guessing that the dark-faced man with a heavy curling beard was Osric Lawrence, the handsome young defaulter who had perished, as they supposed, in the great fire?

By night and by day for long, weary months he had sought his young bride. He almost wore his life out in fruitless search for her. And now, something in his heart told him he had found her at last.

Found her just in time to prevent the wedding which the *élite* of the country had gathered together to witness.

Had she heard what had befallen him, rejoicing afterward when she heard of his death, which freed her from him? Would she cry out against him, betraying his identity to the assembled guests?

If his surmise proved correct, that the bride was indeed Rose Hall or rather Rose Lawrence he would compel her to go with him without a moment's delay; he would resort to harsh measures, if need be, to prevent an outcry or a scene.

The roses lay strewn about him unheeded. He crushed their tender hearts out under his heel, never seeing them as he strode up and down the length of the magnificent room, his heart on fire and his brain reeling.

It seemed to him the length of eternity that he waited. At last light footsteps came hurriedly down the corridor; a small white hand flung open the door,

and a slight figure in trailing, filmy white stepped into the room.

Great Heaven! how well he remembered that graceful, girlish form!

A red mist seemed to sweep before Osric Lawrence's eyes, shutting out everything from his gaze, even the white-robed figure standing before him, with the lace scarf wound round her head veiling her face. In a moment he was kneeling before her. He had seized the little hand, covering it with passionate kisses.

"Do not cry out! Don't you know me, my darling? I——"

The hand was quickly withdrawn from his clasp, and a voice that was certainly not Rose's said calmly:

"One of the servants told me you wished to see me. I am amazed at the indignity I have been called upon to suffer at your hands! Will you explain to me what you mean by such conduct?"

Osric Lawrence reeled back like one stricken a sudden blow, and raised his dazed eyes to the face before him. She had loosened the folds of the lace scarf that had enveloped her, and he saw—not the dark, glowing face of Rose Hall—but a lovely, slender young girl with pale-gold hair, a calm, sweet face and eyes blue as violets.

"So you are Miss Hall?" he gasped.

Lillian bowed, for it was she. The servant had met her in the corridor and made the very natural mistake of sending her to the drawing-room, by telling her that a gentleman down-stairs had bidden her tell Miss Hall she must see her at once.

And Lillian had repaired to the drawing-room without delay.

"Yes, I am Miss Hall," replied Lillian, gravely, "and I repeat that I do not understand why I should suffer such indignity at your hands. Be good enough to finish the decorations at the earliest moment, and go."

"It was all a mistake, young lady—a terrible mistake," groaned Osric Lawrence, hiding his white face in his shaking hands. "I thought you was one whom I had loved and lost long since."

Lillian half pardoned him when she saw the tears fall from his eyes, strong man though he was. She turned away with a gentler expression on her face, and slowly quitted the room.

Like one dazed Osric Lawrence watched the receding form. Heavens! how strangely the graceful, easy carriage of this girl reminded him of Rose! Every gesture of the white hands seemed familiar to him—the poise of the dainty head he remembered so well—even the tone of her voice was strangely like the gay, laughing voice of beautiful, dark-eyed Rose.

"I have gone mad!" he cried out to himself when he found himself alone, and he bent again to his task; and the laugh that fell from his lips was terrible to hear. "Yes, love for a fair, false woman has driven me mad!" he cried, grimly.

Lillian walked thoughtfully to her own *boudoir* to dress for the ceremony. She was to be chief bride maid, and, in the bustle and excitement attending such occasions, she quite forgot the incident in the drawing-room.

Hurrying to Rose's room, she found the maid putting the last touches to her sister's toilet. And a more beautiful bride was never beheld. Never again was Lillian to see the darling for whom she had sacrificed

all that made life worth living, with the same joyous smile upon her lovely crimson lips—never more would she see the same laughing light in those bonny dark eyes—never more would the gay young voice peal out in merry laughter.

White as a snow-drop, Lillian came and knelt before her beautiful young sister.

“Tell me again, Rose, that you are happy, dear,” she said, in a low voice, burying her head in the shining folds of her sister’s dress—“tell me again, and all my life long will I remember your words; they will be like a balm to my heart, and I shall be content.”

Rose’s little hands wandered caressingly over the bowed golden head.

“I am more than happy, Lilly, dear,” she murmured, tremulously. “When I am Royal’s wife, Heaven will have granted me the one great desire of my life. If I had not won him I should not have lived, the world would have been so dark and dreary. If the fear of losing one whom we love is so terrible, what must the reality be? Oh, Lilly, to have the love of one for whom one cares so much is the sweetest boon Heaven can grant!”

She wondered why her golden-haired sister trembled so in her arms, and why the hands she clasped grew so cold.

“I am content to know that you are so happy, dear,” said Lillian again, and a beautiful light shone on the pale, sweet face she raised to Rose.

To one sweet sunshine of love was given, while the other was left in coldness and darkness more cruel than death. The life of one sister was to be a living sacrifice for the other.

“May your life be all sunshine, dear,” sobbed Lilly; “may you be as happy in your future as you have been in the past, with no cloud or sorrow to mar its brightness!”

For an instant the glorious dusk face of Rose Hall paled to the hue of the shimmering satin robe she wore. Her past! How little Lillian knew what the past held for her!

There are hidden secrets in many a life that those nearest and dearest to them never dream of.

A bevy of merry bride-maids came chattering down the corridor, and the loving conversation of the two sisters ended.

Girl-fashion, each one went in raptures over the lovely bride. Was there ever a bride more perfect from the crown of her dark, orange-crowned head to the tips of her tiny white satin slippers? How fair the beautiful face shown, in the sweetest of blushes, beneath the filmy bridal veil!

Royal Montague was waiting for her in the corridor without. He could not repress the start of surprise at the vision of lovely girlhood that glided up to him and laid a little hand timidly on his arm. He was never so near loving her as at that moment. Together they wended their way down to the magnificent drawing-room, gorgeous with tropical blooms and crowded with guests.

A murmur of intense admiration rang through the throng of guests as their gaze fell upon the flushed face of the bride-elect. It was easy to see that Rose Hall was marrying for love. And many of them noticed, too, how strangely white her sister Lillian's face appeared in contrast.

Through the crowded drawing-room the procession moved to the flower-strewn altar which had been erected, and then, as it paused before the clergyman, the music ceased and a dead stillness filled the air.

A vague thought came to the beautiful bride, as she stood there—of that other marriage in the dim old church. It almost seemed to her that it had happened in another world. But the record of it, on page 87, was registered scarcely a year before, she remembered.

Then the minister spoke.

Dear Heaven! where had she heard that solemn, impressive voice before?

Rose felt the air grow dense, the solid earth tremble beneath her feet. Then there came a deep and breathless silence, and she raised her eyes to the clergyman's face. Was it the mockery of fate? This was the same minister who had united her in marriage, scarcely a year before, to handsome, reckless Osric Lawrence!

Would he recognize her, or her name? It was a moment of intense suspense. There came for her a moment whose agony of fear nearly drove her mad.

If he recognized her, she well knew he would not proceed with the ceremony. She knew why.

Heaven was merciful to her. Slowly the beautiful marriage service went on. Rose listened in a strange stupor to the words addressed to Royal Montague. She heard his firm, steady answer. Then, for the first time, the clergyman turned and looked into the death-white face of the lovely bride. Then an abrupt hush, as solemn and silent as death, ensued. He bent slowly and gazed down into the face of the bride, and then—"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Where had he seen a face that reminded him so strangely of this one," was the thought that flitted through the old clergyman's brain as he gazed down into the beautiful white face of the bride-elect.

He was very old and his eyes were dim, his memory weak. It must have been only fancy, he told himself, that he had repeated the solemn words of the marriage service to this fair young girl before. Perhaps she resembled some one whom he had met.

The puzzled look cleared from his aged face, and, to Rose's intense relief, the ceremony proceeded. The words were spoken which should have bound her for evermore to Royal Montague.

Then followed the congratulations and the sumptuous wedding breakfast. To Rose it seemed like a bewildering dream. One thought and one alone occurred to her—she was Royal's wedded wife, and nothing, even death could ever part them. Quickly the hours glided by and evening came. The coach which was to take the newly wedded pair to the pier, stood before the door, and when the final leave-taking was over, Royal led his young wife to the carriage and it whirled away amid a shower of roses and rice, and the blithe laughter of the gay throng of guests.

When a bend in the road hid them from view in the dusky twilight, Lillian Hall, who had kept up with heroic bravery to the last moment, lifted up her white face to the starlit sky, and reaching out her hands with a low moan, fell face downward among the long green grasses where Rose and Royal had stood.

When they hastened to raise her, they found her senses locked in a deep, death like swoon.

No one wondered at it, remembering how well this gentle golden-haired sister had loved beautiful, willful dark-eyed Rose.

Meanwhile the carriage sped quickly on to the wharf. When they found themselves alone, Royal bent down and kissed the blushing face of his lovely girl-bride, mentally vowing that the only reparation he could make her for not loving her more was to surround her with all the care and devotion possible.

He would study her comfort, she should never miss the tenderness that had been lavished upon her in the home she was leaving.

He would be true to her, loyal to her in word, thought, and deed; she should be happy if he could make her so.

The past—was past—he would begin life anew, he would do his best to blot out that other face from his memory, and enshrine only the image of the young wife he had wedded. Learning to love Rose would not be a difficult task.

Rose's great worshipful love for himself had drawn his heart toward her. He meant to be more than kind to merit it.

A half hour later they were on board the steamer bound for New York, and the old life was left behind.

There had never been so fair a night on the bonny Hudson.

In all the years of her after life, years of bitter sorrow and pain, the girl never forgot the bright hour that followed.

Rose and Royal sat on the deck watching the moonlight on the water, and the lights of the beautiful villages that dotted the hill slopes as the steamer glided

by; he was silent and thoughtful, Rose sat gazing at him, her very soul in her lovely eyes.

"Would you mind, Rose, if I were to smoke a cigar?" he asked, suddenly. "Would you care if I left you by yourself a few moments?"

"No," she answered, simply, and he thanked her and walked to the other side of the deck.

He was her husband, this fair-haired handsome man, pacing up and down in the starlight, and this was her wedding-day. How strange it seemed to be.

Royal Montague and his young bride were not the only passengers that boarded the steamer at Peekskill: the boat was just leaving the wharf as a young man sprang aboard, almost missing his footing upon the gang-plank in his eager haste.

It was Osric Lawrence. He had quitted Linden Villa immediately after his encounter with Lillian Hall.

He had not waited to see the bridal party enter the magnificent rooms he had decorated; what cared he for lovely brides and happy bride-grooms?

He had made up his mind to return to New York. Upon inquiring when the next train left the village he was informed that it left at midnight but if he wished to go by water, he could take the steamer at the pier in an hour's time.

Upon what slight threads do the destinies of human lives often hang!

Osric Lawrence knit his brows in a frown.

"Much as I dislike traveling by boat I suppose I may as well take it as to wait for three hours to catch the train," he mused, and that decision was the turning point in three lives.

He sauntered out upon the deck. The first person

upon whom his eyes rested was a slim young girl, in a fawn-colored traveling dress, sitting quite alone at one end of the steamer. The white plumes drooping over the jaunty hat, and the white lace scarf which half concealed and half revealed a rose-bud mouth and dainty dimpled chin formed a charming picture, which almost irresistibly attracted Osric Lawrence to that end of the boat, and he sat down upon one of the folding-chairs opposite to her.

He was looking in her direction, when suddenly she turned toward him and their eyes met.

With a hoarse cry Osric Lawrence sprung to his feet and gained her side, even in the shadowy uncertain light he recognized her.

"Rose!" he cried, "Rose! I have found you at last!"

Great Heaven, had the grave given up its dead? Was she mad or dreaming? Was this Osric Lawrence, whose tragic death she had read of standing before her alive and well?

Her white lips parted in a low moan.

Despite the disguise he wore—looking into his eyes she knew him. And she recoiled from his eager outstretched hands in frantic terror pitiful to behold. Then reckless courage came to her aid.

"Do not touch me!" she cried, vehemently; "I should die if your hand clasped mine."

Osric Lawrence's face darkened with terrible wrath, but before he could speak she went on wildly:

"I know who and what you are, I know all. How dared you, whose hands and whose conscience were stained with crime, lure an innocent, foolish girl into wedding you? What infamy! I wonder Heaven did not strike you dead at the altar!"

“Rose,” he said mournfully; “oh, beautiful Rose, who lured me into loving you by the mad witchery of your wondrous beauty and deserted me, fled from me in the dark hour of my sorest trials. I pray you be more merciful to me. No matter who or what I am, you have linked your life with mine. You are my wife!”

Her face blanched with terrible fear. What if Royal should come up to where they stood at any moment, and turn inquiringly upon the stranger standing by her side—what should she say to him?

Since the hour she had parted from Osric Lawrence on the sands, she had not seen him; and the oblivion that had fallen over his memory after the report of his death made her lot perhaps easier to bear. But now that he stood before her in the flesh, the disgrace, the humiliation, the degradation of her position flashed across her. At any moment this man—a criminal—might publicly claim her as his wife. If she knew what he intended to do, it would be easier to bear.

Then came the thought like a flash of doom, that the knowledge of this man’s existence tore her from Royal Montague’s arms—tore their hearts asunder, cast them as far apart as though a grave lay between them.

Why had Heaven given her Royal Montague’s love—her heart’s desire—if he was to be taken from her? What had she done that God’s mercy had not been shown her?

Her whole soul was racked with terrible suspense and anguish, by the torture of shame and fear of exposure.

At the very sight of Royal she could have cried aloud in her anguish. Only the tight clinching of the white hands in her lap betrayed what she suffered.

Osric Lawrence came nearer her—her fair beauty rendered him desperate.

“Rose,” he cried, and there was the sound of a sob in his voice, “be more merciful to me! give me one kind word. I thought it would be so different. I never meant you to know the story of my sin. Oh, Rose, if you knew what I suffered, the torture I have experienced in longing for one glimpse of you! I am a wicked man. My crime was great; but my sufferings have exceeded it a thousand-fold. I bade you good-bye on the sands that night, expecting to return in a few short hours and take you away with me—so far away that no one would ever see me who would recognize me. Can you imagine what I endured when they captured me and took me away? I fell on my face like one dead with one word on my lips—the word Rose—it was more bitter than death!”

“You should have expected punishment for your wretched sin,” she replied, icily; “but the greatest sin you have committed, is blighting my life. You came to me in the guise of a gentleman. You were not an honorable man—you were a felon fleeing from justice—from the just wrath of men! How dared you persuade a young and innocent girl, so ignorant of the ways of the world, into marrying you—a felon?”

A low cry came from his lips.

“Oh, Rose, Rose, you wound me! I can not bear the sound of such words from your lips; let my love plead for me. I have loved you so madly!”

She raised her white hand with an imperative gesture.

“Your love!” she repeated in proud scorn. “I abhor the word upon your lips!”

"You cared for me once," he said.

Then a terrible white pallor spread over his face; a fearful thought came to him.

What if she had learned to care for any one else? But no, it should not—must not be. He would rather see her lying dead before him than see her happy in the love of another.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The steamer glided on through the blue, starlit waters; but those two standing there, Rose and Osric Lawrence, were oblivious to their surroundings. The agony of death was written upon one face; on the other, determination.

"Now that we are brought face to face with each other again, what do you propose to do?" she asked, faintly, gazing at him with large, startled eyes.

The answer was just what she knew it would be, yet it shocked her to the heart's core. The wonder is that she did not drop dead at his feet.

"I shall claim my wife," he answered. "Will it be so much of a hardship for you to follow my fortunes, Rose?" he asked, noting the deathly whiteness of her beautiful face. "You are far above me now," he went on, steadily. "I have heard all about how you left the old light-house to share the palatial home of a wealthy relative and to become her heir; but that does not daunt me, Rose—you are still my wife."

Should she tell him of Royal Montague, who was the other half of her very soul? Should she tell him that that very day she had stood at the altar with him? Oh, the torturous agony of the bitter-sweet memory.

No, no; she would not—she could not speak to this man of Royal Montague and her love for him.

“You can claim me, but I shall never go with you—never!” she cried, wildly. “I would throw myself into the river first!”

He gazed at her steadily, and the gaze drove her to desperation.

“What is it that you wish me to do, Rose?” he asked abruptly.

“Oh, Osric! if you would but go away, and leave me in peace!” she moaned.

“After losing you, and searching so long for you, that is what you desire me to do?” he said, slowly.

“Yes,” she said, eagerly, her dark eyes brightening with hope.

“Then,” he replied, “you are more heartless than even I took you to be. If you read of my incarceration, you must have read of the report of my death; yet you are not glad to know the rumor was false. I see now that you would have been glad had it been true—then you would have been free.” No answer fell from Rose’s white lips; she knew that all he said was quite true. “But why is it you are so ready to cast me out of your life?” he asked, suspiciously, gazing down into those dark, frightened eyes.

“Because I have never really loved you, Osric,” she answered, falteringly.

“You are very candid,” he said, bitterly. “Tell me,” he cried, grasping the slim white hand that lay upon the rail, his face darkening with rising passion—“tell me that you have not learned to love another since I left you.”

She made no reply. Not to have saved her life would

she have denied her love for Royal Montague. His kiss was still warm upon her lips—those lips should never deny him. He saw that the face on which he gazed grew whiter still.

“You do not speak,” he added, gloomily. “By Heaven, Rose, if I thought you had learned to care for another, I would—well, no matter what I would do. I do not wish to frighten you; yet, all the same, I must have your answer. I will know if you care for any one else!” he cried his grasp tightening on the slim white hands and the lurid light deepening in his eyes.

Not far from where she sat Royal Montague, who would have shielded her with his very life, stood, carelessly smoking his cigar and in animated conversation with a gentleman friend.

Yet in the hour of her deadly peril—when she stood upon the deck of the steamer in the grasp of the half-maddened man—there was no one near to help her or raise a hand in her defense.

She was no coward. Her courage rose equal to the emergency.

“Loosen your grasp Osric; you pain me,” she said, quietly. “Let us walk to the other end of the boat, where we can talk this matter over calmly without fear of being overheard.”

Oh, if she could but bribe him to go away and leave her in peace. Wealth had been showered upon her; she would give him every dollar of it if he would but promise to go away at once and leave her in peace. She had no time to shape her after-course just then.

She broached the subject timidly enough. Osric Lawrence’s wrath rose to a white-heat as he listened to her. Hope died out of her heart when he answered:

"All the gold in the world would not tempt me to give you up, Rose! You are mad to hope for it. I will never give you up!"

Those words brought the despair that possessed her to a climax, and rendered her recklessly desperate.

"There is a way in which you could be forced to give me up," she cried. "If I were to cry out, 'This man is Osric Lawrence!' how long would you be permitted your freedom? You forget the precipice on which you stand when you refuse to make terms with me. You are in my power, instead of I being in yours. Leave the boat at the next landing, if you would save yourself."

"Would you betray me?" he asked, steadily, and gazing unflinchingly into her beautiful white face, a dark flush that boded no good stealing over his own, his eyes flaming with fierce light. He moved nearer her, and his hot breath scorched her cheek.

The very tone of his voice might have warned her. He clutched the white hand he still held, harder.

"And the lips that I have kissed would denounce me!" he said, hoarsely. "I am glad I have discovered your intention. You shall never accomplish it; I will prevent you."

"What do you mean to do?" she cried, attempting to draw back from him, and wrench her hand from his cruel grasp.

Before he could utter the retort that sprung to his lips the hand of Fate tore them rudely asunder.

It will never be known how the accident happened. The huge hull of the steamer quivered a little, and an explosion followed, completely demolishing that part of the deck where Rose and Osric Lawrence had so lately

stood. When the steam cleared away they were nowhere to be seen.

In the confusion which ensued, Royal Montague rushed frantically to the spot where he had left Rose. Great Heaven, she was not there! He shouted her name like one distracted.

In vain the captain reassured the startled passengers no serious damage had been done, no one was hurt. Royal Montague hurried among them, frantically calling upon the name of Rose; no Rose answered.

With white appalled faces they searched the deck, the cabin, and state-rooms but the beautiful young girl whom they remembered so well was missing.

Royal's Montague's grief knew no bounds. The ladies gathered around the bereaved young husband and wept for him; gentlemen grasped his hand in token of sympathy more eloquent than words.

Boats were lowered and sent out in all directions but one by one they returned with the sad tidings: they had searched carefully among the *débris* that floated upon the water; but one trace of the young lady could be found—a bit of lace found floating, which Royal recognized at once as Rose's handkerchief, and which he had seen in her hand when he parted from her a few minutes before.

There was but one conclusion to be arrived at—the shock had precipitated her into the water and she had been struck by a plank, or, perhaps by the plunging wheel of the steamer and sunk to rise no more.

Another passenger was found missing, a man, who had boarded the steamer at Peekskill and who was booked as Henry Smith. Poor fellow he must have shared the same fate.

Every effort was made to recover the bodies, but the waters rippled on under the dancing starlight, refusing to reveal the secret they held.

As all further attempts were useless, the steamer resumed her course again.

Royal Montague shut himself up in his state-room, refusing to be comforted.

Poor beautiful Rose! he had never known how dear she was to him until the hour when she was so cruelly snatched away.

Never more would the sweet crimson lips be held up to him for love's caressing kisses. Never more would the white arms wreath themselves about his neck, while the dark head nestled upon his shoulder, and his lovely young bride whisper to him how much she cared for him.

Royal Montague so tender of heart, sobbed aloud in the fullness of his terrible grief.

Poor Rose, poor pretty Rose, who had loved him so well!

How should he take the story back with him to the proud old grandmother who had loved her darling so fondly and to Lillian who had worshipped her fair young sister Rose? How could he tell them what had befallen her?

Why was he not by her side in the hour of danger? Ah, how he reproached himself for leaving her so long by herself.

Had she cried out to him in her moment of peril, had his name been the last upon her lips?

From that moment lines of care settled upon Royal Montague's face that were to leave it nevermore.

There was great mourning at Linden Villa, when

the lengthy telegram announcing the terrible news reached them, even the servants refused to be comforted, she was so well beloved.

The proud old lady who had loved beautiful Rose so well, listened to the telegram in awful, rigid silence.

"Those whom we love best are taken from us first," she muttered. "Heaven help me to bear it."

The grief of Lillian was pitiful to behold. For long weeks she lay upon her couch in delirium hovering between life and death, and the one cry upon her lips through the hours of the sunlit day, and through the long watches of the dreary night was:

"Rose."

That was the message Mrs. Hall brought to the drawing-room to Royal Montague a few weeks later, when he presented himself at Linden Villa.

"Shall I see Lillian before I leave?" he asked, when he had been stopping there a week. "I go to-morrow."

When the message was taken to Lillian, she bowed her head in her hands, weeping as though her tender heart would break between duty and desire.

"Tell him I will see him," was the answer she sent back.

Meanwhile, dear reader, you and I will learn the true fate of beautiful Rose.

CHAPTER XXV.

A moment after the explosion, Rose found herself struggling in the water. In vain her piercing cries rent the air; the terrible confusion that reigned on board the steamer completely drowned them; and the piece of wreckage to which she clung was drifting further

from the steamer each moment. Ere the boats were lowered, she had fallen back into the water wholly unconscious.

It must have been the hand of Providence that caused her at that critical moment, when certain death seemed inevitable, to become caught and securely wedged in between the driftwood, which cast her at length upon the shore.

For hours she lay upon the shore before consciousness returned to her; but, as she opened her dark, dazed eyes and took in the situation, she remembered all that had occurred, and a piteous cry fell from her white lips.

It was morning; the sun shone upon the water gently laving the moss-grown bank, betraying nothing of the catastrophe those gilded waves had witnessed but a few short hours before.

Slowly up and down in the sunlight Rose paced, looking her fate bravely in the face. She remembered standing with Osric Lawrence when the explosion occurred. She had a faint, confused remembrance of seeing him struggling in the water, striking out for the plank to which she clung, to save her. After that she knew no more.

He was an expert swimmer. He had not returned to the steamer neither had he been lost, she felt equally sure. Then her thoughts went back to Royal Montague.

"Oh, my love, my love, who has been so cruelly separated from me!" she moaned. "Do you mourn for me, believing me lying beneath these waves? Royal, my darling, you and I are nothing to each other now; he has come between us!"

The sun's warm rays dried the black curls that hid her face like a mourning veil, and dried, too, the river water that dripped from her clothing. How long she had lain on the shore she never knew.

She was trying to solve the problem how she could live her life out without Royal Montague's love; for she must not go back to him. The wedding-ring on her finger was the cruelest mockery. She was not Royal's bride: for, Heaven help her, the man whom she believed dead had returned to claim her. She must never cross Royal Montague's path again. The days must come and go, suns rise and set, yet she must not see him; he must think that the dark waves had taken her from him.

As for Osric Lawrence she cared little. That he would search for her until he found her again she well knew, that is, if he had but the slightest inkling of what her fate had been—that she had been spared.

But he should never find her, never. She tried to look the future in the face—the terrible future that seemed worse than death to her.

She closed her dazed eyes to the glare of the sunlight. She had a dim consciousness of hearing the blithe whistle of farm laborers as they crossed the fields to their work, and then all became blank.

Two persons, by chance, chose the river road that morning, sauntering leisurely along on their way to market—they were Farmer Johnson and his wife, and they were in a high dispute in regard to money matters.

The wife's shrill tongue came to a standstill, however, as her sharp eyes discerned something very like

the outlines of a human figure lying among the tall reeds.

"Jonas!" she cried shrilly, grasping her husband's arm in a fright and pointing toward the object; "what on earth is that?"

"It looks like the figure of a woman!" exclaimed the astonished farmer. "Why, by George it is a woman!" he cried, quickly gaining the spot, his wife close at his heels.

In a moment the good little woman was down on her knees beside the prostrate form, pushing the damp curls back from the white face.

"It's a young girl!" she cried. "Oh, Jonas, do look and see how pretty she is, her face is like an angel's. What are you standing there staring for with your hands in your pockets?" she demanded sharply; "pick her up and bring her back to the cottage. I'll see what can be done for the poor lass."

"Wouldn't it be better, Ruth, if we took the girl down to the village tavern?" timidly suggested her better half.

"Will you hold your tongue, Jonas, and do as you're bid?" exclaimed his wife; "the tavern, indeed, for that grasping old landlord to run up a bill on the poor pretty creature, when like as not she hasn't a cent in her pocket. Lift her up and be lively; don't you see she's in a dead faint?"

The angry light in the black eyes turned upon him warned the farmer that it were better to obey without further remonstrance; he plainly saw that his wife had made up her mind.

He lifted the slim figure with alacrity, and in a few

moments more they had reached the farm-house, cutting across lots through the wheat fields.

A young girl sat in the door-way paring apples; she sprang to her feet scattering the fruit in all directions, staring in amazement at the strange spectacle that met her view; her father striding hurriedly along the path bearing a girlish figure in his arms, her mother following up in the rear.

“For mercy sakes, pa, who in the world have you got there? who is she, and what’s the matter with her?”

“Molly!” exclaimed her mother sharply, “you’re like your father for all the world; stop staring and asking questions; run quick and see if there’s hot water on the stove, and bring me the peppermint-bottle and the mustard-jar, towels, hot blankets, and help me get this poor young creature’s clothes off and into bed, and—”

“Don’t give the girl so many orders at once, mother,” expostulated the farmer soothingly; “don’t you see you have muddled her head so she don’t know what to do first?”

The good woman started kitchenward in high dudgeon.

“It’s always the way, if I want anything done I have to do it myself!” she cried angrily. “You two are a pretty pair of drawbacks for a smart woman like me to be tied to!”

And she flounced out of the best room, leaving the lovely stranger to the care of the curious Molly.

She returned in a trice, fairly loaded down with bottles, blankets and etceteras. The farmer was hastily

invited to vacate the room, then the work of restoring the beautiful young stranger began at once.

Slowly the dark eyes opened, but there was no light of reason in them. It was pitiful to see the tears on the long, dark lashes.

"I'm afraid the poor little thing has the fever!" exclaimed the farmer's wife pityingly; if she has she won't be able to leave this bed for many a long day!"

The beautiful dark eyes regarded her with a frightened light in their depths. The crimsoned lips babbled empty nothings.

Now and then a word or sentence could be distinguished.

"Life was so hard to bear," the quivering lips muttered over and over again.

"I'm afraid the poor pretty creature has seen some great trouble," the farmer's wife concluded, and her motherly heart went out to her in kindest sympathy.

For long weeks Rose remained at the farm-house; she had fallen into good hands and was tenderly cared for.

Vaguely they wondered who she was and whence she came, and how she came to be lying in a dead faint among the reeds by the river.

That she was not a creature in want they readily surmised from the texture of her clothing, which was of the daintiest and costliest kind, glittering rings adorned the little white hands, and in the pocket of her dress a handsome purse was found well supplied with bills.

The mystery that shrouded her appearance there deepened as the days rolled by, and her fever increased.

If the beautiful stranger died among them there was

no way of learning her identity. The incident was duly written up by a special correspondent, and found its way into the columns of the New York papers; but the papers of the great metropolis had chronicled like events too often for the general reader to cast more than a passing glance at the article; it was read without comment and forgotten.

Meanwhile the dread fever had reached a climax, and the lovely stranger opened her eyes to the cares of life again after weeks of suffering, gazing in dismay at the strange faces and plain homely surroundings.

"Where am I?" she asked, blankly raising her eyes to the face of the farmer's wife. "I have had such horrid dreams; where is Lillian?" she asked impatiently; "I want her at once!"

Before they could answer her a piercing cry broke from her lips, a cry so heart-rending that it brought tears to the eyes of those standing around her couch.

"I remember, oh, I remember all!" she moaned.

Like a flash memory had returned to her. She remembered being carried ashore by the driftwood and of falling into a dazed stupor among the tall reeds near the wheat fields, with the sound of voices in her ears.

She remembered how she had made such valiant efforts to make her presence known when oblivion overtook her.

"I found you lying in the path by the river," said the farmer's wife. "I brought you to my own home and nursed you. You have been very ill for long weeks, there was no way by which I could find the address of your friends or I would have sent for them."

"Oh, they must never find me!" cried Rose in the keenest alarm. "I am cast adrift from them for ever-

more. No one who ever knew me shall see my face again!"

The day came at length when Rose was able to leave the farm-house.

Their entreaties to tell them who she was, and whence she came, met with a firm denial.

"My name is Rose," she answered them, simply, "further than that I can not tell you. No one in the world ever met with such a fate as I have had, and it has blighted my life; that is all I can say for myself. Yet when I am gone think of me kindly," she went on, with tears standing in her great dark eyes, "for Heaven knows no girl living has such need of pity and sympathy as I have."

She pressed most of the money her purse contained, together with the valuable rings she wore, into the rough toil-worn hand of the farmer's wife:

"You have been very kind to a helpless stranger," she said, "let me repay you as best I can; every kind action to the helpless meets its reward in God's own good time. You will one day meet yours."

That was the last they ever saw of the beautiful stranger whom they knew only as Rose.

Rose had decided to make her way to Peekskill. A strange yearning filled her heart to see Lillian once again, then to go far away, whither she cared not

She would not dare to make her presence known to Lillian, for the startling announcement that she lived, would be sent to Royal Montague at once, and that must not be, for if he should come to claim the bride the ruthless waves had torn from him, she would be forced to tell him the story of Osric Lawrence and his claim upon her.

“Oh, if I had Lilly to console and advise me,” she moaned, “but I dare not tell her, she would shrink in horror from keeping such a secret. I will look upon Lillian’s face, but she must not know it.”

The train on which Rose was a passenger, sped quickly on through the dusky twilight, and the darkness of night had fallen ere it reached Peekskill.

Rose alighted, and drawing her veil closer over her face, started to walk to Linden Villa.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was quite three miles to Linden Villa from the depot, and although Rose felt weak from her recent illness, still she would take no conveyance, and undertook the journey on foot.

How brightly the moon shone down upon the earth, bathing the trees, the flowers, and white winding road in its silvery light. How the golden stars glowed in the blue sky.

The birds had folded their wings and sought their nests among the leafy branches.

The flowers had folded their dewdrops close to their hearts with their tender petals, and were rocked to sleep by the gentle night-wind.

Rose passed slowly along the well-remembered road, tears falling like rain from her dark eyes.

Suddenly the sound of a horse’s hoofs upon the pebbled road caused her to start, and she drew back into the shadow of the trees until the horseman should pass.

Ah, how often she had cantered over that same white road riding by Royal Montague’s side. How gay and roseate the world had looked to her then.

Could she be the same creature, changed so completely in a few short weeks?

Nearer and nearer the horseman approached, his face toward her in the clear moonlight.

He was abreast of the trees now. Ah, Heaven, it was Royal Montague!

She never knew how she restrained the mad impulse to cry out to him, "Royal, oh, my love! my love! mourn for me no longer, I am here!"

Then she remembered she would have no right to rest in Royal Montague's arms, to feel his passionate kisses of joy upon her face, to listen to his words of delight upon being restored to him again.

Her face grew white, her lips pale, her slender figure swayed to and fro, to be so near to him, yet to be parted from him.

A moment more and he had vanished from sight, leaving the solitary figure behind upon the road. She knew he was going to Linden Villa, he had turned his steed in that direction.

"Poor Royal," she sobbed, "how unhappy he is! He is going to the dear old home where we met and loved each other. Would Lillian greet him coldly?" she wondered. "Oh, if Lillian would but be kind and gentle with him, speak words of sympathy to him, make him feel at home at Linden Villa!"

He had brushed the drooping branches of the trees carelessly aside with his hand as he rode by them. He would never know of the lonely figure that stood under them passionately kissing the green leaves his hand had touched.

At last the towers and turrets of Linden Villa greeted her view as she turned an abrupt curve in the path.

She entered the arched gate and stole into the grounds unobserved, and crept up close to the long French window that opened out on to the porch.

The sight that she saw brought tears to her eyes. Her grandmother sat in her favorite arm-chair near the window.

The kind old face was strangely altered and haggard, her head rested on her hands, and Rose felt by instinct that she was thinking of her.

As she gazed, a white hand put back the velvet draperies of an inner apartment, and Lillian glided into the room, crossed over and knelt at Mrs. Hall's feet.

Rose saw her grandmother stoop and lay her hand lovingly on the girl's fair hair. Then Lillian slowly quitted the room.

A moment later she appeared upon the veranda, a thin gauze scarf around her golden head, and strolled down the pansy-bordered path into the grounds. Rose knew she was going toward the chestnut grove—it was her favorite promenade.

A great longing came over her to creep after Lillian, to fall upon her knees before her.

How she longed to lay her tired head on Lillian's breast and sob out all her pitiful story.

To tell her the story of what had happened to her that week when she had been left with Abel Martin and old Deborah, the servant, at the old light-house.

She would tell Lillian how she had learned to abhor them and to whom she found herself so cruelly fettered, this man who was a base defaulter, with all the strength of her heart and soul.

She would keep nothing back from Lillian, she would

tell her truthfully that it was this that had caused her to fly from the old light-house, lest this man should return and claim her.

Oh, how Lillian would gather her in her arms and weep over her as she told her piteous story! She would readily agree with her that it were best not to make her presence known to Royal—or, in fact, to any one else just then. She would see that it was the wisest and the only course to pursue. Lillian was so wise, so good, she would plan some way out of it for her.

Softly the slender figure stole after Lillian as she passed the flower beds, the lilac and magnolia walks, on toward the chestnut grove. Both had crossed the star-lighted park and were nearing the shadows of the trees, but a few feet apart.

“Lillian!” called Rose, gently.

But Lillian did not hear her; her own thoughts engrossed her.

Rose was silent for a moment. A bird flew from its nest in the nearest tree, a rabbit rustled in the brush-wood, the wind stirred some fallen leaves, a wood-dove called out to its mate.

“Lilly!” she called again, more softly than before.

The girl paused in a startled, solemn wonder.

“It must be only fancy,” Lillian Hall said to herself, drawing the fleecy folds of her scarf closer about her. “Even the wind seems to whisper to me with the voice of Rose.”

Before Rose could utter her sister's name again, a light step came swiftly down the pebbled walk, and even before he spoke, poor Rose knew it was Royal Montague advancing hurriedly toward her sister. Oh, how her soul went out to him! Again she drew back

into the shadow of the trees until he should leave her sister. It was quite out of the question for her to speak to Lillian now.

Only the fragrant blossoming lilac branches separated her from Royal Montague and Lillian. He had come up to her sister now.

"Lillian!" he cried out in a glad voice. "Here you are! I have been searching everywhere for you. I am sure you ran away to avoid me."

The girl crouching behind the lilacs listened in wonder. His voice had never sounded like that when he had addressed her. There was an undercurrent in it that puzzled her.

She saw Lillian's fair, sweet face flush hotly in the bright white moonlight. She looked up at him with a smile, drawing bashfully away from his outstretched hands, answering, confusedly:

"I did not know that you were searching for me, that you wanted me, Royal."

His reply was like the shock of doom to the beautiful, hapless creature listening to them both so intently:

"You did not know that I wanted you! Oh, Lillian, what nonsense! Is there a moment in my life that I do not want you, my darling?"

These were the words that broke a human heart!

CHAPTER XXVII.

Clearly through the solemn stillness of the summer night, the words fell from Royal Montague's lips upon the heart of the beautiful solitary figure crouching among the lilac branches.

Royal believed himself quite alone with Lillian—he could speak his thoughts freely now.

"You avoided me purposely, Lillian, that I might have no opportunity of telling you what is in my heart; you must have read what it wanted to say in my eyes. You are cruel, dear."

"Royal," said Lillian, gently, holding up her little white hand warningly. "Remember, you are not to talk to me so, at least not yet, it would almost seem as though we had forgotten the memory of Rose."

What Royal Montague's answer was, the figure crouching behind the lilac leaves never knew. She saw him clasp the little white hands he held, fondly in his own, raise them to his lips, and kiss them tenderly.

"Am I mad, or am I dreaming?" sobbed the wretched girl, who watched and listened to the two who were so utterly unconscious of her presence.

She saw Lillian gaze at him with a grave, thoughtful face.

"Do not turn from me, Lillian," cried Royal Montague, "remember, love-making between us dates far back. Ah, Lilly," he went on, quickly, "what a love story ours has been! How strangely we have been separated; you were my first last and only love, Lillian, always remember that."

The words fell like drops of molten lead upon the breaking heart so near them. The swaying figure had sunk down among the sharp thorns and the brambles, but she did not even feel the pain of them. The earth and sky seemed to meet above her. The leaves of the trees seemed to moan in the night-wind. The moon hid her sorrowful face in the white clouds.

Again Royal Montague's voice broke the silence, and the crouching figure strained every nerve to listen.

"I do not remember, Lillian," he said, "ever to have

heard a story like ours. What have we not suffered since that sunlit day we parted in the park, going to sacrifice ourselves upon the altar of duty."

"Do not recall it, Royal," sighed Lillian, faintly.

"I must refer to it, dear," he said; "it is all over now, we both did our duty nobly to Rose while she lived, now we must forget her—that is, forget all the pain and sorrow, and only remember that we tried to make her happy. If Rose had lived, you and I would have buried our love for each other as deep as the boundless seas. Rose should never have known that there was a secret between you and me, dear."

If the hand of God had stricken Rose dead, the beautiful white face upturned to the night sky could not have been whiter.

The moon in all its rounds, looking down in its pure white light upon sin, suffering, pain, and all human woes, never looked upon a sadder sight.

"In my thoughts I go over the past time and time again," continued Royal Montague, slowly. "I was heart whole and fancy free when I first met Rose, to love her, although she was all that was beautiful and good, never occurred to me. Imagine my intense surprise, Lillian, upon making the discovery in an unexpected manner that Rose loved me. I was amazed, bewildered, that the worshipful love of a human heart had been lavished upon me, who had not sought it. I was intensely sorry for Rose, and my pity for her led me into asking her to marry me. There was no passionate love-making between us—never! In the after days I saw the folly of giving the hand where the heart could never go. When I first gazed upon your sweet face I knew then, what the first great and only love of a man's

lifetime meant. You and I had met too late, Lillian, I was engaged to Rose."

They passed on, arm in arm, through the chestnut grove and over the moonlit lawn to the house. Then silence reigned.

Like a hunted hare Rose sprung to her feet, hurrying through the pleasure-grounds, through the coppice, and into the heart of the grove.

No human being was near, but the birds were soon startled by the passionate cries of a broken heart—cries that fell freely and clearly on the soft, sweet air, and seemed to rise to the heavens—bitter, passionate cries that took with them the burden of a most unhappy soul. After a time they died away; the moans and sobs ended. The girl lay among the crushed golden-rods, with wide-open, horror-stricken, somber eyes, looking the terrible future full in the face.

Carefully, step by step, she went over that past which had seemed such a golden, roseate dream to her, brightened by love's dazzling flame. It was pity, then, that had prompted Royal Montague to offer her his hand. Oh, the shame of it! The blood in her veins seemed to turn to fire, and her white face to scorch at the very thought of it.

Now she understood plainly much that had never occurred to her before. Now she knew why Lillian had fainted when she had accidentally met Royal Montague in the drawing-room—they had been lovers once.

Royal and Lillian had met after his fatal engagement to her—met and loved each other—yet they had parted. "Sacrificed themselves on the altar of duty"—those were the words he had uttered.

Had he but told her—oh! had he but told her that he

had learned to love Lillian best, she would have given him up to Lillian and gone out of their lives, and they should never have looked upon her face again.

How cruelly these two had deceived her by hiding their terrible secret love for each other—Lillian, whom she had believed as fair and sweet as the angels in heaven, and her lover, whom she had worshipped so blindly.

So, through all this time—even when they stood at the altar together—Royal had not loved her!

She had worshipped him. She had made no secret of it; she had told him so often, with kisses and tears, that life held nothing for her but his love. Oh, the bitter sorrow, bitter shame! He had listened to her, knowing all the time that it was Lillian whom he loved, and not her! She had talked with him, planned with him the future they were to share together. She had thought of herself as his wife, he had stood by her side while the solemn words were uttered that bound him to her for life, yet all this time his heart had yearned for Lillian.

Now she knew what the outward coldness meant between Royal and Lillian which had always puzzled her so. These two who had loved each other, and parted, could never be cold, calm, formal friends.

Oh, if either of them had but told her how matters stood! Though she knew it would have broken her heart, she would have given him up.

In that moment the great yearning love in her heart was slain; no words could picture such a grief as hers. Now she could see why the hand of Fate had torn her from Royal Montague's arms on their wedding-eve. It would have been a thousand times more merciful if

Heaven, in its infinite mercy, had let her die in the cold, dark waters, instead of letting her live to discover this.

Her future mattered little enough to her now. She would go quietly away; Lillian and Royal should never know she lived. He had not grieved for her untimely fate; it had not grieved him that matters had turned out as they had; it set him free to woo and win the love of his heart. That she had not died would be no barrier to his marriage with Lillian. The appearance of Osric Lawrence had snapped asunder the slender cords that bound her to Lillian's lover.

Silently she turned her beautiful face from all that she had loved best on earth, crept slowly out of the park and away from Linden Villa without casting one glance behind. There were no tears in the great somber dark eyes; she was beyond all that.

The sound of music—sweet, melodious harp music—floated out to her as she moved silently as a dark shadow down the avenue. She knew it was Lillian's fingers that thrilled the chords of the harp until they trembled with the tenderest melody. She could imagine, with vivid fancy, just how Royal was bending over her. She knew the very look that was on his face, and how the love-light glowed in his handsome eyes.

That same evening, the solitary figure that had alighted at the Peekskill depot in the dusky twilight, left it again on the midnight train. An hour later, the lights of New York gleamed in the distance before her.

Rose Hall—for such she preferred to still call herself—drew the folds of her wrap closer about her, looking wistfully out of the car window. She had never been alone, at night, in the streets of New York. She quite dreaded it, for she had not the least notion of

where she intended to go, when she reached there. She told herself, at length, that she would wait in the depot until daylight.

There was the usual bustling throng of people hurrying to and fro, as the train slackened at length in the depot.

One man stared in undisguised astonishment at the hesitating girlish figure that alighted from the train, quite alone, timidly entered the waiting-room and took a seat. Another moment and he had crossed the room, stopped directly in front of her, laying his hand heavily on the girl's shoulder.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Rose glanced up with a startled cry into the face of the gentleman before her.

"Are you Miss Gordon?" he asked, with a smile, touching his silk hat. "I was sent to the depot to meet a young lady who was to arrive by this train—a Miss Gordon, who is to act as governess to my sister's children. You are the only young lady unattended whom I have observed coming from this train. I am not mistaken, I hope. You are the lady in question, are you not?"

"No, sir," said Rose, raising her eyes to the pleasant face, "I am not Miss Gordon—I am Rose Hall."

The gentleman drew back with an air of mortification.

"I beg ten thousand pardons!" he exclaimed, apologetically. "While my mistake is awkward, it is certainly a most natural one, Miss Hall."

Rose bowed slightly and turned away. The young man was not to be repulsed so easily. He gazed down

into the beautiful face turned impatiently away from him, determining to know more of its owner.

There was no one to warn her that the young man standing before her was one of the most dangerous *roués* in New York. Well bred, polished, aristocratic he certainly was; but these attributes do not always proclaim a gentleman.

Willard Sinclair was a wealthy down-town dry-goods merchant, and a bachelor. He was immensely popular with all the belles and marriageable ladies, but he might not have been such a favorite in exclusive society if some of the events of his private life had been made public, and the breath of scandal fanned certain whispers into life.

The young merchant had a passionate love for pretty faces, and as he looked down into the exquisite innocent face of Rose Hall, he told himself that she was by far the most beautiful girl he had ever beheld.

There was no one to tell Rose that the clever story of "the governess he had expected on that train" was purely a fiction he had woven together for the express purpose of affording him an opportunity of speaking to her.

Young girls who read the story of Rose Hall should profit by what they read. It should be a warning to them to be chary of exchanging a word with a stranger.

Willard Sinclair smiled as Rose turned her face away. He had gained this much knowledge, that the name of the beautiful young girl was Rose Hall.

Looking closer at her, he saw the traces of tears on her fair face.

"You are a stranger in New York, are you not?" he asked, questioningly.

Again Rose bowed, and he went on:

"Most young girls who come to the city alone are in search of friends or employment. I hope the former is your case."

"I have no friends," replied the girl, lifting those wondrous dark eyes of hers to his face. "I am quite alone in the world, sir."

The retort that sprung to his lips died away upon them; he could not utter the words while those dark eyes were upon his face.

"If you are in search of employment, perhaps I can be of assistance to you," he said, with a more courteous bow than before. "Perhaps it was a kind fate which threw me in your path. Would you like to take the place of governess this Miss Gordon has failed to claim?" he queried.

In case she answered "Yes," which he quite believed she would, he made up his mind what course he should pursue; he would not count the cost. A girl who is ready to accept as truth the plausible story of a stranger, must not find fault with the consequences if they discover at length that they have been willfully deceived.

Rose's answer saved her from a terrible fate.

"You are very kind, sir, but I could not accept such a responsible position as governess, for several reasons."

He bit his lips with vexation.

"Perhaps you have something better in view," he said, twirling his tawny mustache with his white hand, upon which a costly diamond gleamed.

"No," said Rose; "it is not that. I think if I were

to find employment in some store, it would be best for me."

A peculiar smile curved his lips. "Why not let her try the hardships of clerking in a store for a little while?" he argued within himself.

"Again kind fate may have sent me to your rescue," he said, pleasantly. "I can procure you just such a situation. Call to-morrow morning at eight o'clock, sharp, at this address," he said, producing a card from his case, "and we will see what can be done for you. What do you intend to do—that is, where do you intend to go in the interim?" he asked, abruptly. "You can not think of remaining in this waiting-room until to-morrow morning; it is only a little after midnight now. I should advise you to go to a boarding-house and seek rest."

Rose flushed with painful embarrassment, remembering how little money there was in her attenuated purse wherewith to purchase such a needful luxury.

He saw the flush on the lovely face, and quite understood the cause of it; but there was a certain dignity about this young and lovely girl which made him hesitate about offering her assistance; he concluded he had better not.

He was loath to leave her side, yet he could find no reasonable excuse to remain.

"You will be sure to come to-morrow morning to the address indicated on the card?" he asked.

"I shall be only too thankful to come. I am very grateful, indeed, for the kindly interest you have manifested in me, sir," said Rose, great tears shining in her dark, velvety eyes.

"Do not mention it I pray you," he replied; "any

gentleman ought to be only too pleased to render a helpless woman all the assistance in his power. That is my name," he continued, pointing to the first name on the card. "I shall be very glad to serve you in any way."

He touched his hat and walked away.

"How kind Heaven is to have raised me such a good, noble friend in my hour of need!" thought Rose, gazing after him. She remembered that she was Rose Hall, the petted heiress, resplendent in glittering diamonds and costly robes, no longer. Now she was Rose Hall, an alien from home and friends, dependent upon her own exertions, thrown upon the world's mercy.

She had often met poor, tired working-girls walking to and from their labors, as she rode by surrounded by all the trappings of wealth; but let this be said for her, she had always looked upon these noble young working-girls with profound reverence and pity in her beautiful eyes; even while little dreaming that the day would come when she would be one among them, earning her bread as they did.

The long hours till daylight wore away slowly.

Rose watched the pink flush creep into the eastern sky from the window with thankful delight.

She purchased her slight breakfast at the lunch stand, and smoothing out her tangled curls, and freshening her appearance in the dressing-room, was soon ready to seek the address contained on the card.

"MESSRS. SINCLAIR & HOLLISBURY,
Dry Goods' Emporium—B'way."

The card contained an engraving of the building, and Rose saw that it was a mammoth establishment.

Eight o'clock found her there, and she made known her errand in faltering words—it was her first battle with the great world.

“Oh, yes,” answered the manager, “you are the person no doubt to whom Mr. Sinclair had reference this morning. You are to take charge of the ladies' kid glove department, the last counter to the right, and facing the private office.”

“Can I not commence at once?” asked Rose, and to this the manager assented; he had received his order previously.

“Step this way, Miss—— Miss——”

“My name is Rose Hall,” she said, quietly.

“Follow me, Miss Hall.” And he led her through the throngs of richly dressed patrons, past the array of clerks and salesladies, who watched her with furtive glances, back to the department indicated. “Miss Carson,” he said, sharply, addressing a tall, slender girl standing behind the counter, “Miss Hall is to have charge of this department henceforth: be good enough to show her the private marks, the cost prices, and so forth, without delay.”

Turning on his heel, he walked away leaving Edith Carson and Rose Hall standing gazing into each other's face.

Timidity shone in the dark eyes of Rose, bitter dislike in the gray eyes of Edith Carson.

Willard Sinclair sat in his cushioned arm-chair, in his private office, watching Rose through the plate-glass window, with a curious smile on his face.

“She is more beautiful than I even imagined her to be,” he thought, complacently.

Rose secured lodgings with two or three of the other

girls employed in the store. Then the great struggle of life began, with its hardships, its petty jealousies, and all the heart-aches that fall to the lot of a girl who is forced upon the cold world to earn her bread.

If Rose Hall had been plain of face, and timid and unobtrusive in manner, her life might have been uneventful enough, but with a face as gloriously beautiful as a dream, in its rich, dark, glowing beauty, many a pitfall was dug for her unwary feet. To Rose Hall beauty was a curse instead of a divine blessing. It was not long before it was noticed how Willard Sinclair, the handsome young proprietor, watched her as he passed through the emporium, and from the office window; this alone was enough to rouse the bitterest hatred against poor hapless Rose in the hearts of the other young salesladies.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The summer days had given place to autumn, and autumn had settled into the dread frosts of winter, and still Rose Hall remained at the mammoth dry-goods emporium of Sinclair & Hollisbury.

A few days after Rose had entered the establishment, Willard Sinclair had been hastily called away on business; therefore the little plans he had laid out, in which beautiful Rose was the principal figure, had to be laid by for a time. The snowflakes were flying in the crisp December air ere he returned. He found Rose paler, but quite as pretty as ever.

In the interim, Rose's life, either at the store or at her lodgings, which she shared with Edith Carson, had little sunshine in it. It was exceedingly hard to get

along with Edith—she was so jealous of the attentions one and all paid to Rose.

Straightway Edith had informed her of their handsome young employer's reputation outside the limits of the social world. She "posted her thoroughly," to use her own expression, on the danger that lurked in Willard Sinclair's smile.

"I would advise you to turn your head away when you see him coming in your direction, and avoid seeing or speaking to him when you can," pursued Edith—"of course you wouldn't dream of such folly as setting your cap for him, for I warn you he is not a marrying man—or, if he ever did marry, it would be some grand society belle worth her millions, not one of his poor dependent salesladies, you can depend on that!"

"I shall remember all you say, Edith, and profit by it," declared Rose.

And she did remember. Hearing so much of the gossip of the young girls concerning him caused Rose to have quite a dread of Willard Sinclair by the time he returned.

Employment for the hands and employment for the brain, together with constant companionship, is the greatest panacea for human woes that the world has ever provided. With all the tragic sorrow Rose Hall had gone through, she would have died, or gone mad, had she not thrown herself into the vortex of work. She had no time to think—no time to brood over her sorrow; if she had allowed herself to think of Royal Montague and Lillian she could not have endured it.

One thrilling incident alone broke upon the wearisome monotony.

One day a customer had returned with a pair of gloves, which she wished exchanged.

Rose took the package from the lady's hands, unfolding the bit of newspaper which the customer had wrapped about them. She was just about to brush it into the waste-paper basket when one of the headlines caught her eye, and held her spellbound.

Long after the customer had left her, Rose Hall stood there, white as marble, staring at the bit of crumpled newspaper she held in her hand.

The date was intact—two days subsequent to the disaster to the steamer, that terrible night on the Hudson, which had so nearly cost her her life.

The headline bore this startling caption:

“THE TRUE FATE OF OSRIC LAWRENCE!”

Half a column was devoted to the article. It spoke of the finding of the body of a man which the waves had cast up on the shore near Fishkill, and the thrilling discovery that the man had been disguised. The body had been identified as that of Osric Lawrence, one of the convicts who had been supposed to have lost his life at the time of the prison fire, the incidents of which had been chronicled in those columns at the time, together with Osric Lawrence's history.

The description of the disguised body tallied with that of the passenger who had been lost off the steamer. Thus it was that Osric Lawrence, who might have been an ornament to society, through his pleasing manner, his gifts of mind and accomplishments, had met an untimely fate.

The newspaper item closed with these words, which

seemed to dance in letters of fire before the eyes of Rose Hall:

“The body of the other passenger who was lost on the ill-fated steamer that night—a young and lovely bride—has never been recovered.”

Rose Hall drew a deep breath. So Osric Lawrence was really dead at last. He would cross her path never again.

There had been a time when she would have cried out to Heaven in thankfulness, not for the death of a human being, but because she had been set free from the terrible fetters that were wearing her life away.

Osric Lawrence's life or death mattered little to her now. She had believed him to be a barrier between Royal Montague's love and her own; but she had been all wrong, it was Lillian whom Royal had loved, not her—Heaven help her!

Rose was more quiet than ever the remainder of that day, and her face was paler. This was all that betrayed the emotion she felt.

Willard Sinclair had been home a week. Each day he passed and repassed Rose's department; but the girl's eyes were sure to droop when she heard his foot-step and she never raised her white lids until he had passed her.

This state of affairs rendered Willard Sinclair bitter with anger.

“The idea of a pretty shop-girl whom I rescued from the very jaws of starvation taking such high and mighty airs with me,” he muttered. “By the eternal, I'll not brook it! The little beauty shall feel my power here.”

Once Rose had been sent for to come to the office,

and the way her employer took her hand to lead her to a seat, and the glance he bent from his bold eyes upon her, caused Rose's heart to throb with alarm at once.

She snatched her little hand from his grasp with a flash of the rising, willful anger and impetuosity of old.

"You sent for me, Mr. Sinclair," she said, stiffly. "I prefer to stand and learn what it is that you want with me."

"Come, come, Miss Hall," he said. "I do hope we are not going to quarrel. I want to become the best of friends with you, if possible," and again that peculiar look flitted over his face as he gazed at pretty Rose, while he twirled the ends of his tawny mustache with his white aristocratic hand.

Wild and reckless though this handsome young merchant prince was, he never forgot the graceful dignity with which this fair young girl drew herself up proudly as she answered:

"There is one way, sir, and one way only in which you could command my respect and friendship."

"I should like to be enlightened," he declared, ironically.

"That one way," repeated Rose, raising those wondrous dark eyes to his face, "is to leave me quite alone."

Willard Sinclair opened his eyes very wide.

"Dictated to by one of my salesgirls!" he muttered under his breath. "Well, well, this is decidedly rich!"

Had he met beautiful Rose Hall in the great world of society he would have been the pink of propriety and chivalrous courtesy, but with a paid dependent in his own establishment that was quite a different affair. Her evident scorn and disgust piqued him.

"I will show her," he thought, "that those little airs and graces are lost upon me."

He did not mean to be rude to her, still he intended that she should worship at his shrine, as the generality of women did.

He would win her heart he promised himself, and after that—ah, well—the young debonair merchant never worried himself in thinking of the dark clouds in the future; the heart of a young girl was nothing to handsome Willard Sinclair.

"So you wish to know why it is that I sent for you this morning, fair Rose," he said musingly.

"If you please, sir," she said with dignity, her cheeks flaming scarlet with wounded pride at being addressed so familiarly, "I should be very grateful if you would not talk to me so; I—"

A low mocking laugh interrupted her.

"I sincerely hope you are not going to be prudish, Miss Hall," he said; "if there is anything I do detest it is a prude; really, now, prudery does not become fresh, fair, pretty faces like yours; leave that for homely old maids; my advice is wholesome I assure you."

Rose shrunk from him in unspeakable horror, scorn and disgust blazing from her great black eyes, and before he could utter another word she had turned and quitted the office.

It happened to be Saturday afternoon when this little episode occurred, and an hour later when the office-boy brought around the small envelope containing the money for the week's work, Rose discovered to her great dismay that half of her slim salary, which amounted to but five dollars per week, had been deducted.

Rose put the remainder in her purse and walked home with a death-white face and troubled sinking of the heart.

"I shall leave at once if I am to be treated as badly as this," Rose concluded, "and get into some other place where I will meet with due respect."

The next morning upon reaching the emporium Rose was informed that she had been transferred to the costume department.

"I'm sorry for you, Rose," declared Edith Carson, while at heart she was secretly delighted. "You will find it was perfect heaven here compared to what it is there; you will earn all you make in the costume department I assure you."

There was one thing Rose was thankful for—she was removed from the constant gaze of Willard Sinclair.

The forewoman of the costume department looked at Rose's slim white hands with forbidding eyes.

"It's very particular work here," she declared; "and a novice would ruin the fine imported silks and velvets. The order we have to fill now is of the most particular kind; I do not know whether I ought to trust you to run up the seams or not; it's a wedding-dress—a gorgeous affair of white satin and lace. It's for a wealthy young society gentleman's bride-elect, who is too sensible to send off to Worth to get her wedding-dress made; and a fine young lady handsome Royal Montague will get when he weds her—why, by the way, her name is your own—a common enough name in this country I should say—Hall—Lillian Hall is her name, but instead of being dark like you she is as fair as an angel!"

The girl standing before her as pallid as death itself made no reply.

It was Lillian's wedding-dress then that was to be made. Lillian was to wed the lover who had wrecked the life, love and happiness of hapless Rose Hall.

CHAPTER XXX.

"An elegant wedding-dress, isn't it?" continued the forewoman, shaking out the rich, gleaming satin and foamy lace. "How beautiful she will look in it. Her handsome lover will be proud of her and no wonder. Why, what are you doing, girl?" cried the forewoman in alarm. "You are ruining the goods!"

The shimmering white satin had slipped from Rose's nerveless fingers, and she had fallen face downward among the soft laces in a dead faint.

"Dear me, what in the world could Mr. Sinclair have meant to send any one addicted to fainting fits! it really won't do."

Still she felt sorry for Rose when the girl's dark eyes opened, with the dreariest look in their dark depths that she had ever beheld.

"Are you ill?" she queried, gazing down into the white face.

"It was only a sharp pain at my heart," replied Rose, "I—I am used to them."

"I do hope you haven't ruined Miss Hall's wedding-dress. I—"

She did not finish her sentence, for at that moment a tall, graceful girl clad in rich blue velvet and ermine fur, opened the glass door at the other end of the apartment and glided in.

"Dear me!" cried the forewoman, gathering up the

satin and lace with alacrity, " ' speak of angels and you hear the rustle of the wings ; if here isn't Miss Lillian Hall herself. Just step in behind those curtains, these very fine young ladies often object to curious apprentices being present when they come to see about their dresses."

Rose staggered back into the little recess indicated, barely in time to escape observation.

With hands clasped tightly over her beating heart, Rose listened intently to every word that fell from Lillian's red lips.

She drew the heavy curtains ever so slightly apart, that she might have a full view of her sister's face.

Ah, me, how happy Lillian looked ; the light of love beamed in her blue eyes, a happy smile played about her lips.

She had come to give the necessary instructions in regard to her costumes.

Rose heard her tell, in her sweet, hesitating way, that her marriage was to take place on Christmas Eve. She intended to pass the winter abroad, and in all probability they would return home the following spring. Mr. Montague was building a residence on Fifth Avenue, and it would not be ready for occupancy till then.

The darkness of death seemed to close around Rose as she listened.

How completely they had forgotten her, these two : she was less than nothing to them. They would marry and be happy, for they loved each other.

She was not the first young girl in this world who loved with all the passionate, worshipful love of her heart, one of whom in turn, loved another.

Lillian had won Royal Montague from her, yet, in her heart, she could not quite hate her for it.

In the past, Lillian and Royal had loved each other. She could not help remembering Lillian's heroic self-sacrifice in the past, when, without a murmur, she had given up the lover, whose love was more to her than all else on earth.

One of the cash boys from the emporium appeared at length with a message that Mr. Montague was in his carriage before the door awaiting Miss Hall's pleasure. Lillian blushed, as she always did when her lover was mentioned, and a few moments later took her departure.

Rose strained her eyes to watch them as they drove away behind a handsome pair of bays.

She noticed how tenderly he lifted Lillian into the vehicle, and how handsome he looked as he took his seat beside her, and the glittering equipage dashed out of sight.

Lillian had caught sight of the white, tear-stained face pressed close against the window-pane, and she sunk back among the garnet cushions with a little stifled cry, clutching eagerly at her lover's arm.

"Look, Royal," she cried out, in a fluttering voice—"look at that face up at the window there! It reminded me so much of—of our poor lost Rose."

When Royal Montague raised his eyes to the window indicated, the face had disappeared.

"It was merely your fancy, my darling," said Royal, tenderly. "You are nervous—you must not allow your thoughts to dwell upon it. You and I both know that our poor Rose lies beneath the waves of the restless

Hudson. We will not refer to the past—the subject is such a painful one.”

He talked to Lillian upon other matters, and by the time they reached home he had succeeded in banishing entirely from her mind the memory of the face at the window which had startled her so.

When Royal Montague had gone to Mrs. Hall, long months after the supposed death of Rose, and asked for the hand of the granddaughter, Lillian, Mrs. Hall had been greatly surprised. She could not understand how one who had loved beautiful, daring, willful Rose could learn to love gentle, fair-haired Lillian, who was quite the reverse in all things of her lovely young sister.

Tears welled up in the eyes of Mrs. Hall.

“I had hoped to see you the loving husband of darling Rose,” she said; “but now that she has been taken from you, and you will one day marry, no doubt it may as well be Lillian as a stranger—that is, if you can care for each other.”

That was the answer Royal took back to Lillian, and the announcement of their engagement soon followed.

Mrs. Hall made preparations for a handsome wedding, but never, even for one moment, could she forget Rose—the beautiful dark face with its roguish dimples, and saucy, smiling, crimson mouth, and the great, dark, limpid eyes were ever before her. She had made an idol of Rose, and our idols are always shattered.

Meanwhile the days that were speeding on were dark days to Rose Hall. There was scarcely a day when she was free from the persecutions of Willard Sinclair; his open flattery annoyed and oppressed her. More than once she had encountered him on her way home, and

of late he had dropped into the habit of calling at her lodgings on slight excuses.

This terrified Rose more than all the rest, and at last she made up her mind to quit the establishment of Sinclair & Hollisbury and seek employment elsewhere, where she could have peace.

Willard Sinclair's anger, when she sent in her resignation, knew no bounds.

On the self-same evening she encountered him on her way home.

It had been snowing hard all day, and the streets were quite covered with the white snow-drifts. Still the snow was falling heavily, rendering near objects, in the fast-gathering darkness, almost indiscernible.

Rose was making her way through the heavy drifts when a hand was laid heavily on her arm, and, glancing hurriedly up, she found herself face to face with Willard Sinclair. Her heart gave a quick throb of fear, for she noticed that his face was flushed with anger, and the fumes of wine were upon his breath.

"I understand you are intending to leave us, pretty Rose," he said, grasping the girl's arm firmly, forcing it within his own, compelling her to walk on with him.

"What's the reason of that, may I ask?"

"Pardon me, sir; I should not care to reveal to you the exact reasons for leaving your employ; you ought to be able to guess what they are. I would be glad if you would kindly leave me; I prefer going to my lodgings by myself."

Willard Sinclair laughed uproariously, grasping the slender arm still closer.

"Do you think I shall lose you so easily as that?" he cried, his eyes blazing. "One does not care to see a

beautiful bird fly away that he has had so hard a time in caging."

Rose saw that the young man was beyond reasoning with.

"If I were to permit you to go," he went on, quickly, "I would not only lose sight of the prettiest face I have ever beheld—a face that has driven me to despair with its wondrous beauty—but I might hear the story of my infatuation for my pretty saleslady gossiped over by idle tongues, and I could not brook that. You shall not repeat the story elsewhere; I shall prevent it."

"I should never think of mentioning your name when I leave your employ, I assure you," declared Rose, haughtily. "On the contrary, it will be a great pleasure to me be able to forget you."

He bent nearer to the girl's lovely flushed face.

"What if I cared for you enough to marry you—what then, Rose?" he asked. "What if I told you I loved you?"

"Please do not mention love to me, Mr. Sinclair; I could not endure it. Let me think as kindly of you as I can, by leaving me at once."

"I shall never leave you again, beautiful Rose!" he cried, angered intensely by her persistent entreaties. "I shall not only prevent you from repeating what has happened, but I shall make you mine, whether you will or no!"

The influence of the wine was strong upon him; he scarcely realized what he was doing when he clasped his arm about the slender figure and kissed the beautiful face of the girl struggling so frantically in his firm embrace.

A piercing cry sprung to Rose's lips that brought

Willard Sinclair to his senses; but before he could release her and frame any sort of apology, a young man walking behind them, who had taken in the situation of affairs at a glance, suddenly sprung forward, his honest face fairly glowing with rage and indignation.

"Take that for annoying a lady, you scoundrel!" he cried, and in an instant the young merchant prince, the courted, petted lion of society, measured his length in the white snow-drifts, by a well-directed blow from the stranger's muscular arm.

At the first vibration of the stranger's voice, Rose had shrunk back pale as death, drawing her thick veil hurriedly over her face. It was Royal Montague!

Willard Sinclair rose to his feet, white with rage.

"You shall render an account to me for interfering in my affairs!" he said, furiously. "Give me your address."

"I am at your disposal at any time, sir," said Royal Montague, tossing his card at him. "Suffer this young lady to pass you at once, or I shall repeat the lesson I have just given you. Stand aside, I say!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Allow this young lady to pass," repeated Royal Montague, haughtily. "Stand aside, I say!"

Willard Sinclair turned abruptly on his heel.

"We shall meet again, Mr. Montague," he said. "And, as for you, girl," turning to Rose, "you have made a relentless enemy to-night!"

The next instant he was walking rapidly away.

"Can I assist you further?" asked Royal, kindly, turning to the slight figure so closely veiled. "You have had a most unpleasant adventure."

"You have been very kind; you can render me no further assistance, thank you, and good-night," answered a low, musical voice that struck Royal as sounding strangely familiar.

He raised his hat courteously, the girl bowed and glided swiftly away.

Royal stood gazing thoughtfully after her.

"I can not rid myself of the impression that I have met that girl before—the voice, the inclination of the head, the gesture of the little hand seem oddly familiar," he mused.

He hailed a passing *coupé*, sprung into it, and was soon whirling rapidly homeward. An hour afterward he was in Lillian's presence, and had quite forgotten the little incident.

Words are powerless to express the feelings of Rose Hall as she wended her way through the snow-drifts to her lonely lodgings.

At the first glance at his handsome face, the vibrations of the beloved voice, the heart in her bosom seemed to stand still; a mad impulse came over her to fling herself at his feet, crying out, "Oh, Royal, Royal, don't you know me? Take me back to your heart! Love me a little, or I shall die!"

Only Heaven knew what the girl suffered in the effort to repress the despairing cry trembling on her white lips.

"I wrecked his life and Lillian's once. I must not do it again," she muttered, pressing her hand over her throbbing heart. "He would hate me for it, and I could never bear that."

Oh, if he had but loved her, now that there was no

barrier between them, how different life might have been for her!

She had tried to school her heart to think of him calmly, but at the very sound of his voice all the smoldering flame of love burst into life again, all the old, passionate love sprung into her heart a thousand times stronger than ever.

That night the dark head of Rose Hall tossed restlessly on her pillow, and in the solemn hush of the midnight hour, strange thoughts came to her. Why should Lillian be happy in his love, while she was doomed to the bitterness of despair. It would be so easy for her to part them. All she would have to do would be to make her presence known to Lillian, and claim Royal Montague as her own wedded husband. No one knew the story of the past. There was but one witness against her—to step out of that dark, dim past—the register in the vestry of the dim, old church at Wilton; she remembered what was recorded there—the marriage of Osric Lawrence and Rose Hall.

“Let me try to forget that one act of folly,” she cried out, sharply—“let me think that my life dates from the moment I first met Royal Montague!”

She could not still the passionate yearning of her heart that cried out so strongly for Royal Montague's love.

Oh, the mighty power of unsubdued love that throbbed in her heart, influencing every thought and shaping every action!

Yes, she could claim him. No one would know.

Let this much be said for her—poor, hapless Rose Hall—she did not realize the terrible sin in which she

was about to plunge herself; she was blinded by the mighty power of love.

She loved him so well, death would have been easier to bear than to see him pass out of her life forever. She saw a way by which he might be hers.

It would not be so hard for Lillian to give him up as it would be for her to lose him; for had not Lillian given him up once before, when she learned how dearly she—Rose—loved him? How she would kneel at Lillian's feet and pray her not to hate her for separating them.

Lillian was as sweet and good as an angel. She knew that she would clasp her white arms around her and tell her, "Do not grieve for me, Rose dear. I will give him up to you without a murmur, since it is God's will. You are restored to us from the very grave—that will be recompense and solace enough for me."

How should she account for the time that had intervened since the night of the explosion up to the present time? She would tell them how she had been picked up unconscious on the white sand by the old farmer and his good wife, who brought her to their home, nursing her carefully back to life through her long and dangerous illness. She would not tell them she had been there but a few brief weeks; let them think she had been there long months, if they would—up to the present time.

The more Rose pondered over the matter the greater her yearning became to take her place in the great world again by Royal Montague's side. She had fought a great battle with herself, and found that she could not give him up to Lillian. What would life be worth to her without him?

"He cared for me once," she told herself, leaning her dark head upon her folded arms. "Even if it were but a passing fancy, why may I not fan that fancy into flame? A great love wins love; his heart may turn to me at last. It must turn to me! I will win him by my great devotion—my deep, absorbing love. I will be as patient as Griselda. Yes, the time will come when he shall love me!"

It is hard to change a woman's resolution when love urges her on.

The next morning Rose made her toilet with feverish haste, and bidding adieu to the lonely room where she had seen so much privation and misery, turned her steps toward the aristocratic portion of the city, and to the home of luxury in which Lillian dwelt.

She knew the habits of the family well. At that hour her stately grandmother would be taking her chocolate in her own room.

Lillian would be cutting flowers in the conservatory for the breakfast-table.

She would go to the side entrance—it would be best to meet Lillian first—and alone.

The footman stared amazed at the shabbily dressed young person so closely veiled, who stood on the marble steps requesting to see Miss Lillian.

"You'll have to go round to the basement door and wait there for her," he answered, gruffly.

But at that moment Rose caught sight of Lillian's dress at the lower end of the corridor, and quick as thought she had dashed past him and gained Lillian's side.

Lillian turned quickly about, gazing in kindly surprise at the slender young girl before her.

“Who is it you wish to see?” she asked, gently.

“You, Lillian,” came the choked, sobbing answer from behind the folds of the thick, dark veil.

Lillian Hall started violently—the cluster of roses she held in her hands fell to the floor unheeded—who was this young girl who came to her in the garb of a stranger—yet with a voice so like the voice of—Rose?

It was not Celia Derwent, for she was abroad, had been abroad long months, and she would not return like this.

No, it was certainly not Celia; yet, who could it be who spoke her name thus familiarly?

She trembled in spite of her efforts to speak calmly, as she endeavored to pierce the folds of the stranger’s veil.

“Be seated,” said Lillian, pointing to a chair.

“Are we quite alone?” asked the sobbing voice.

“In Heaven’s name tell me who you are!” cried Lillian, in great agitation. “Your voice affects me—it is so like the voice of a dear one whom I have lost! Raise your veil, and tell me what you wish of me—we are quite alone here.”

Ah, how fair Lillian looked, standing there before her, the sunlight drifting in from an adjacent window streaming upon her golden hair and gentle face. Rose knew what her coming would bring to poor Lillian. She would gain a sister, but, ah, she would lose a lover. She would lose the one to whom her heart had gone out. Would Lillian greet her with joy, or would she look upon her sudden reappearance with horror?

Would her sister’s love fail her now that they both loved the same man?

She was dashing the cup of happiness from Lillian's lips for evermore.

Slowly she drew aside the folds of the veil and stood before Lillian.

A moment of thrilling intensity followed, which was broken by a piercing cry from Lillian's lips! The sisters stood face to face at last.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Lower and lower dropped Rose's bowed head under the horror-stricken gaze of Lillian's eyes, and a voice like no other voice—like nothing human—said:

"Lillian, darling, do you not know me? Am I so greatly changed?"

"I am dazed, bewildered, alarmed!" cried Lillian. "If it were not that I know her to be dead, I should have mistaken you for my lost Rose—you are so like her."

"I am Rose," said the girl, humbly. "I am your lost sister, restored to you. Oh, Lillian, Lillian, have you no welcome for me? I have suffered wreck and illness that brought me to the very gates of death; but I escaped all to come back to you!"

Lillian Hall was too utterly shocked to find words in which to answer.

"Lillian," cried Rose again, coming and kneeling at her feet, "welcome me, dear! Are you not glad that my life has been spared to you?"

It was this appeal that brought Lillian to her senses. The shadow of doubt cleared from her noble face, she opened her arms with a sobbing cry, and in an instant the dark head of Rose was pillowed on her faithful breast.

Lillian realized instantly what Rose's coming meant for her, but she put the thought from her. Better that true love lay slain and dead a thousand times, and have Rose, her darling Rose, spared to her. She would have given up not only love, but life itself for Rose.

The excitement and enthusiasm Rose's return created knew no bounds. How her grandmother received her! how she seemed to worship her! to hang upon every word and look! The restoration of her darling seemed almost as wonderful as though she had arisen from the dead. When she found herself alone with Lillian, Mrs. Hall laid her hand on the girl's arm with a white, disturbed face.

"It was well that Rose returned to us in time, dear," she said. "How can we break the news to her—that the young husband from whose arms she was so cruelly torn on the night of that terrible explosion, was soon to wed you, Lillian? It will break her heart."

"Then, why need we ever tell her, grandma?" sobbed Lillian. "Her heart must never be wounded by the knowledge. I—I could not bear to stay here, now that Rose and Royal will be united. I will go quietly away—Rose need not know why. I am sure Royal will wish it so."

"Have you sent for Royal?" asked Mrs. Hall, abruptly; "if not, let it be done at once, and upon you Lillian, devolves the task of breaking the news to him." She drew nearer to the girl, looking anxiously into her blue, upraised eyes; the muscles of her dear old face quivered with motion. "You will not forget, child," she whispered, "that all is over between you and Royal, for evermore; he is your lover no longer. Do

not encourage him to regret Rose's restoration—if you see such a tendency—”

“Grandma,” said the girl, her fair face drooping, “you have no need to remind me in which path duty and honor lie. He is Rose's husband, therefore quite safe from my love.”

“Let not a moment be lost, Lillian,” said Mrs. Hall, huskily. “Send for Royal at once.”

Silently she turned to do her bidding. She walked quickly to her own room, indited a brief note requesting his immediate presence, rang the bell for the servant and dispatched it. Then she sat quite still, looking her future in the face, telling herself that all hope lay dead now; her happy love-dream was over.

The few lines she had written was the letter of a girl whose heart was breaking—eloquent, passionate, despairing, there was no attempt to reason it, or tell him why she had sent for him so hurriedly.

An hour or more she sat there. She did not cry out or utter any moan, but, sinking down on her knees, lifted her white arms to the sunlit sky with a tremulous sigh, murmuring, brokenly:

“Let my sorrow be bridged over by remembering that Rose—my darling Rose—has been returned to us!”

Heaven knew best why her happiness was to be laid a second time in ruins.

Hastily rising from her knees and brushing away all traces of tears from her face, she went at once to Rose's boudoir to prepare her for Royal's coming.

Tenderly she arrayed her in one of her own robes, smiling through her gathering tears to see how fair Rose looked.

No wonder Rose looked pale, passing through the terrible experience she had related to them.

"If you had but telegraphed or written to us while you were at that farm-house we would have gone on there and fetched you home, oh, so gladly!" said Lillian. "You were by far too weak to travel home alone."

Rose wondered what Lillian would say if she knew the real truth. She saw how pale Lillian's face was, and she knew what brought that whiteness there; but it was too late to draw back now, and give him up to Lillian—besides, she told herself, Lillian's love for Royal was cold and calm compared to her own passionate, idolatrous love for him. The power of love urged her on—no, she could not give him up to Lillian, and live.

Royal Montague was sitting in the private office of his father's bank when Lillian's note was brought him by a special messenger.

He blushed like a school-boy when he saw the monogram on the envelope; he knew it was from Lillian.

He smiled when he saw the dainty chirography penned by the hand he loved so well, and the smile deepened on his handsome face as he noted the words, "in haste," written in the corner.

He wondered what his darling had to say to him in such haste as to cause her to write.

He tore open the envelope, glancing with mystified eyes over the tear-stained page. He could not make out the sense of it—he simply understood that something unusual had happened, and Lillian wished his presence at once.

His sleigh stood before the door, and, drawing on his

gloves, he left the office, and, running lightly down the steps, sprung into it at once, turning his horse's head in the direction of Lillian's home.

As he passed a florist's window he espied great clusters of dewy carnations and, thinking Lillian would be sure to be pleased with them, selected a large bouquet for her.

A few moments later he had reached the house. He was a privileged person there, and went at once to the morning-room, where he believed he should find his sweetheart. No graceful form sprung to meet him with outstretched hands—no rosy, blushing face was turned expectantly from the sunlit window when the door was opened—the room was quite empty.

He laid the carnations down upon the table, and touched the bell.

"Tell Miss Lillian I am here," he said to the servant who answered the summons.

A half hour passed, yet Lillian did not make her appearance. She had sent for him "in haste," yet seemed in no hurry to come to him.

At length he heard footsteps approaching slowly in the corridor without, and he heard the rustle of a woman's dress.

He knew it was Lillian, for her approach was always heralded by the faint odor of heliotrope.

He sprung from the sofa on which he had been seated, advancing to meet her with eager warmth and open arms, love-light shining on his handsome face and in his eyes.

His arms fell motionless by his side, and a cry of astonishment burst from his lips at the white face that was turned toward him from the door-way. He would

have sprung to her side and clasped her in his arms, but she shrunk from him with a pained, scared face.

"You must not touch me, Royal," she whispered, standing before him, with her big blue eyes raised piteously to his face and her little hands locked tightly together. "Something has happened which parts us forever."

"Lillian!" cried Royal Montague, in the most intense astonishment, "what on earth do you mean? You are trying to get up a sensation to frighten me, dear, and to test my love for you!"

"Hush, Royal!" she cried. "It is quite true. A barrier has risen suddenly between us, which—"

He looked at her curiously. It was no girlish jest, he was beginning to comprehend; the sad blue eyes, with the great circles under them, were too serious for that. Had she heard anything regarding him? No, it could not be that; his life was as clear and open as the page of a book.

"I think," said Royal, "that I need ask Heaven for patience. You have promised to be my wife, and now you tell me some barrier has risen between us to part us! You are cruel to me, Lillian. Fate parted us once before; you must not take it into your hands to try to make me miserable again."

"Hush, Royal!" cried the girl; "I can not bear it! Don't you see that my heart is broken? If you speak harshly to me I shall surely die!"

"Lillian," he asked, abruptly, "has your grandmother repented giving you to me—at the very last moment almost—because I was once the husband of your sister Rose?"

"No," said Lillian, faintly; "it is not that."

"Then I will listen to nothing else," he declared, impatiently. "I will not hear one word more! Nothing under heaven shall take you from me, I promise you; I love you too well for that!"

"Listen to me one moment, Royal," she said, catching her breath falteringly. "It is not the grave of Rose that stands between us—it is a living presence!"

"Lillian," he said, seizing her cold little hands and gazing steadily down into her white face, "do you know you look at this moment just as you did on that night when you decided we must part—that we must both be sacrificed on the altar of duty to Rose—that we, who loved each other so, must bury our love and meet as strangers. Now it is very different with us, Lillian. We are free to love each other and to find happiness—at last!"

"Let me tell you while I have the strength what the barrier is that has risen between us, Royal," she gasped. "This is why our love for each other is over for evermore—Rose still lives!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A thunderbolt falling from a clear sky could not have startled Royal Montague more than the words that fell from Lillian Hall's lips:

"Rose still lives!"

Was Lillian mad or dreaming?

She saw the look of bewilderment on his face and crept nearer to him.

"It is quite true, Royal," she whispered, "Rose did not die in the cruel waves that night. Heaven has restored her to us."

And in a pained voice, catching her breath at every

other word, Lillian told him the story of Rose's experience as it had been related to her.

Royal Montague scarcely moved, scarcely breathed as he listened.

When Lillian had finished, these two, who were to have been wedded in three short weeks, and who loved each other so well, stood looking into each other's eyes with a blank, awful look, thinking of the terrible gulf that now lay between them.

It seemed that they were not destined to be happy in each other's love—it was not to be—for the second time their hearts had been torn asunder.

“Heaven knows, Lillian, that I do not grudge sweet Rose her fair, young life, but, oh, you and I, Lillian, we are parted more cruelly than if one of us lay in the grave! My heart is with you, and I am the husband of Rose!”

Lillian put up her hands with a passionate gesture, she would not hear him—he must not speak to her so—he must love Rose, who had been so miraculously restored to him from the very arms of death.

He laid his head back against the sofa upon which he sat, covering his face with his hands.

Lillian came and knelt before him, but he dared not lay his hand on the golden head, or take one of the white hands in his, Lillian was not for him.

“Royal,” she said, gently, “I am going to fetch Rose to you, and I pray you here on my knee, by the love you have borne me, be kind, gentle, and loving with her, she has been through so much. Do not let her feel that you are not overjoyed at her restoration to you. Remember how she loves you, Royal, you are her world. God has given her back to you, accept her as

a gift from a divine hand. Rose must never know how near we came to being wed, Royal. The knowledge of it would break her heart, it must be a dead secret between us for evermore. I am thankful that our engagement and notice of wedding was not announced. It is a great blessing to Rose that we intended to have such a quiet one."

She rose, and was about to quit the room, but Royal's voice arrested her steps.

"Lillian," he called, hoarsely, "give me at least a brief half hour in which to recover myself; the startling news has unmanned me. I must be calmer before I can see Rose. I can almost fancy myself in a dream from which I shall waken presently."

"Promise me you will take Rose in your arms, showing her only love and kindness," pleaded Lillian, earnestly.

"I promise you to do my best," said Royal, huskily.

How the moments passed he never knew. At length he heard footsteps, and raising his face he saw the two sisters enter the room side by side.

The wonder drifted across his brain that both of these young girls, so gloriously beautiful, each with a different kind of beauty, should love him so well.

With steady hands that never trembled or faltered, Lillian took Rose's hands in her own and clasped them about Royal's neck. Another moment and they were alone together.

There had never been a greater sensation than that which was caused by the announcement in the papers of the wonderful restoration of Royal Montague's bride, whom he had mourned as dead for long months.

Those who remembered reading the account in the daily papers at the time, of the beautiful bride who was thrust from the bridegroom's arms on her wedding eve, and was cast into the seething water by the accident to the steamer, and for whose body search had been made all in vain, read, with tears of joy in their eyes, how she had been saved. Cast upon the shore unconscious, and how she had been cared for by humane people until the ravages of brain-fever left her, and she was able to proceed home to her overjoyed husband and friends.

It was fortunate for Rose that all the accounts concerning her always mentioned her as Royal Montague's young bride. The salesladies in Messrs. Sinclair & Hollisbury's dry-goods emporium read the "romance in real life" with great interest; but not one of them ever dreamed that the young bride mentioned was Rose Hall, who, not long since, had been among them.

The forewoman in the costume department read the brief article with wonder.

"His bride restored to him just as he was about to be married to beautiful Lillian Hall! Dear me, what a dilemma!" she thought. "I wonder what Miss Hall will do with her beautiful wedding-dress now? I am glad that the other poor young creature did not lose her life; still, I can't help feeling sorry for poor Miss Lillian—she was so sweet and good. Royal Montague seemed to fairly worship her."

That afternoon the half-finished wedding-dress was sent for by Mrs. Hall. When it arrived, she put it quite out of sight. She knew it would have been a painful thing for Lillian's eyes to rest on, and if Rose

had beheld it she would have been all wonderment over it.

That same afternoon Royal took Rose away. He could not remain there; the presence of Lillian seemed to unman him. They went to Washington. Society received them with open arms. No one dreamed—not even Royal Montague himself—what a pitiful skeleton lay in their closet, which would one day burst forth from its narrow confines.

Lillian read, with tears in her eyes, what a genuine sensation her beautiful, brilliant sister was creating at the capital, and of Royal Montague's constant devotion to her.

"God grant that their love will end happily," murmured the noble girl.

From the moment of Rose's return she had heroically battled with her own love for Royal. There are many who would have nursed a secret, yearning love for him down deep in their hearts. Not so Lillian Hall. She was too pure, too noble to give a loving thought to one who belonged to another.

She took up the burden of life again cheerfully, not despairingly; and those about her, who knew her secret, and guarded it so well for her, wondered at her great fortitude.

But, ah, how fared it with beautiful, peerless Rose? The days sped on and lengthened into weeks and months. A year had marked the flight of time since Royal and Rose had taken up their residence in Washington.

Royal Montague had set himself the task of learning to love Rose, and the task was not a hard one to accomplish.

There never was a face so fatally lovely in its dark, witching beauty.

Her very love for him would have won his love in return in spite of himself.

There was a magnetism about her that men could not resist.

Royal Montague had wisely put all thoughts of Lillian from him, devoting himself to his fair young wife.

Once Mrs. Hall wrote to Rose that a gallant young officer was greatly infatuated with Lillian, and that if Lillian could be induced to look upon his suit with favor, a wedding might be the result in the near future.

Rose looked up at Royal with startled, earnest eyes, as she read aloud those lines of her letter.

A momentary throb shot through his heart for an instant, then he looked up with a pale, thoughtful face, remarking:

“Perhaps it would be better for Lillian to marry, if the young man is worthy of her.”

The same mail that brought Mrs. Hall’s letter, also brought one from Celia Derwent announcing her intention of paying them a visit.

“I suppose we must bow to the inevitable,” sighed Rose, “and tell her to come.”

She remembered what a “dead set” Celia had made to capture Royal.

“Miss Derwent will probably not wait for permission,” remarked Royal, dryly, “she will take matters into her own hand and follow her letter at once.”

His surmise proved quite correct. The next day the charming blonde arrived, bag and baggage.

A season in the gay capital was what she desired above all things.

"What a delightful home you have, Rose," she cried, glancing around her with innocent eyes and a heart fairly bursting with envy. "How happy you must be to be sure!"

Celia meant to make the most of her stay there. She would not return to New York without being engaged or married, if it lay in human power.

She had not lost an hour's sleep grieving over the loss of Royal Montague and his wealth, but had set about looking for the next eligible man without delay. It had not been her fault that they slipped through her fingers.

It would have been better for Rose if Celia Derwent had never crossed her threshold. Her coming was like the coming of the serpent into the Garden of Eden—it was the beginning of the bitter end.

The shadows of doom were beginning to gather over Rose's head, silently but surely.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Cecil Derwent had not been in Rose's home two days before she discovered a subtle change in Royal Montague's bride.

"What is it that has changed her so greatly, I wonder?" pondered the lovely blonde, "she does not seem happy. There's something wrong somewhere, I must find out what it is."

As for Rose, she was no insensible heroine, this unhappy, erring girl, who had taken honor in one hand, love and pitiful deceit in the other, deliberately choosing the latter.

She had told herself that she would forget the bitter past, that her life should begin from the moment she had stood at the altar with Royal Montague.

She had blindly duped herself with that promise, but, ah, the reality was very different to that future which she had pictured to herself.

She tried to comfort herself with the whispered assurance that the world would never know the story of her folly.

The old register in the stone church by the sea-shore, would keep her terrible secret safe from Royal Montague and the world. Osric Lawrence was dead, she was quite safe now.

But Heaven never meant that a sin should prosper. The conscience of beautiful Rose was never at rest.

She could see that she was very dear to Royal Montague now, and terror thrilled her soul lest she should lose him.

Her life was cursed with the thought that she had taken him from Lillian, would not Heaven in turn take him from her who claimed him through the most pitiful of frauds?

Her great idolatrous love for Royal Montague was to be the sword which should slay her. Rose did her best to drown all regrets and be happy.

Even Celia Derwent, who enjoyed gayety with a keen best, was almost astounded.

There was no cessation of pleasure in the life Rose led; balls, *fêtes*, charade parties, dinner parties, archery meetings, croquet parties—every variety of amusement that it was possible to imagine followed each other in rapid succession, no day passed without some kind of entertain-

ment. Rose seemed to dread only one thing, and that was time for thought and leisure.

Celia Derwent had grown tired of asking herself what had come over Rose, that she should be so recklessly gay.

Even those who shared Rose's hospitality, began to talk of her, and say that it was sad to see one so young and beautiful giving up heart and soul to the pursuit of pleasure.

Royal was the only one who saw no great fault in this—he made all allowances. He said to himself: "That all young brides would most naturally enjoy their first season at the gay capital, providing they had wealth lavished upon them to gratify their every desire, so why should not Rose?"

Once a thought came to him how different a wife gentle Lillian would have made him, but he put the thought from him as an unworthy one, Rose loved him so well it was wrong to give one thought to another.

One afternoon Rose and Celia had gone to the Art Academy together. There was to be an exhibition of rare pictures from the old masters. Tickets had been sent to a select few, and the affair promised to be a very enjoyable one.

Rose and Celia stood by the western window admiring one of the pictures, when Celia turned to her suddenly:

"Rose," she exclaimed, under her breath, "who is that gentleman leaning against the marble pillar to the right of us? For the last five minutes he has not taken his eyes from your face. He must be an acquaintance of yours, and as your market's made, if he is a rich bachelor or widower, pray introduce me."

Rose turned her dark eyes from the picture she was contemplating, to the person indicated. The floor seemed

to rock beneath her feet, the grand pictures in their gilded frames to whirl around her, the air to grow dense and stifle her. She knew him in the first instantaneous glance, Willard Sinclair, the dry goods prince of New York.

No mask could have been whiter or colder than her face, but in that moment her composure did not leave her, although she saw that he was studying her face with eager intentness.

“Do you know the gentleman?” queried Celia, anxiously.

“No,” said Rose, turning abruptly away.

Willard Sinclair had given a violent start when his eyes first encountered Rose.

“Heavens!” he exclaimed, under his breath, “how like the face of pretty Rose Hall! Can it really be she I wonder?”

He looked at the costly plush robe and sables she wore—at the diamonds that flashed from her person, in considerable doubt.

Could this elegant young girl be Rose Hall, for whom he had been searching for long months, and who seemed to have vanished as completely from New York, as though the earth had opened and swallowed her? He was mystified.

At that moment, one of Celia’s admirers stepped up to them, and a few moments later had taken Celia to the other end of the gallery to admire a favorite picture.

Rose sunk down upon a velvet divan, glad to be left alone.

If Willard Sinclair had recognized her, he would not be apt to permit her to leave the gallery without attempting to speak to her; better that an opportunity should be af-

forded him when she was quite alone. Not for worlds would she have him recognize her before Celia.

Her heart sank when she saw him making his way toward her.

Once or twice he passed her, but the proud eyes he hoped to catch, looked directly over his head.

He would not be repulsed in this manner, he would satisfy himself beyond a doubt whether she was Rose Hall or not.

At last he stopped before her, raising his hat with a courteous bow:

"I beg a thousand pardons for usurping a ladies' prerogative of recognizing an acquaintance, but I must know whether or not you are—Rose—ah, pardon me again—if you are Miss Hall or not?"

It was one thing to address one of the pretty salesgirls in his employ by her given name, but quite another matter to dare use the same unpardonable familiarity toward the elegant young lady before him.

She raised her dark clear eyes to his face, with well-assumed haughty surprise:

"You are evidently in error, sir," she said, with cutting coldness. "I am not the person you refer to."

There was nothing else to do under the circumstances but to apologize profusely and move on, but as he walked away the conviction fastened itself strongly upon his mind that she was Rose Hall.

He had seen that lovely face too often to be deceived in it. But what motive could she have for thus denying her identity? Had she married rich, and wished to conceal the fact from the fashionable world that she had ever been a New York shop-girl?

He set his white teeth together.

“ Yes ; that must have been her reason.”

He drew his breath hard as he looked back at her. She had been pretty before, but she was more than beautiful now. The dark, glorious face, set off by its costly adornings, was magnificent. What a superb wife she would have made for him!—what an honor she would have been to him! He would have been the envy of every man in New York.

He clinched his hands tightly together as he gazed at her. Even in her humble obscurity and poverty she had despised and scorned him! If she were beyond his reach now, how glorious it would be to take revenge upon her for scorning him—how it would pull down her haughty pride to spread the gossip about that she had once toiled for her bread!

Rose sat on the divan like one dazed until Celia returned to her. Acquaintances smiled, bowed, and spoke to her as they passed her by, but she neither heard nor saw; her thoughts were in the wildest confusion.

Dear Heaven! what if Willard Sinclair should, by chance, ever breathe to any one who knew her—who might, in turn, relate it to Royal and her relations—the horrible truth that she had been for long months in his employ in New York, for then the truth would come out that, instead of flying directly to Royal Montague’s arms upon her recovery, she had hidden from him. The amazement of all would know no bounds. She could not tell them that she dared not return to Royal on account of Osric Lawrence, for then all the pitiful story would be sure to be discovered, and then—

Willard Sinclair kept strict watch upon the beautiful, slender figure until he saw her enter her carriage and disappear.

"Can you tell me who that beautiful lady is—the dark one, I mean, who just entered that coach?" he asked of one of the attendants of the academy.

"I have heard the name, but I can not call it to mind just now," answered the man; "she comes here to the weekly Thursday receptions. She's married."

Willard Sinclair's eyes glittered.

"Can you find out her name and address for me?" he asked, slipping a silver dollar into the man's hand.

"Yes, sir," said the attendant, touching his hat respectfully to the liberal stranger. "Call any time after next Thursday, and I will have it for you."

"It seems to be a case of love at first sight with him," muttered the man, looking after the tall, aristocratic figure of Sinclair until it vanished from sight; "and it didn't seem to make any difference, my hint to him that the beauty was not for him—she was not free to be wooed and won."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Willard Sinclair did not receive the desired information concerning Rose which he had so ardently hoped for, for ere the next Thursday rolled around, Royal received letters which necessitated a sudden trip to Boston.

It was quite possible that business might require his presence there for at least a month, and it was decided that Rose should spend that month at Peekskill.

Cecil Derwent, who was making the most of her visit, heard the news with the greatest dismay.

"What! leave Washington and the season at its height; why, Rose, how can you consent to such a thing?" she cried; "it's a positive shame for Mr. Montague to ask

you to go to that horrid country-seat in the dead of winter; you'll break your heart with loneliness!"

"Grandma and Lillian are there," replied Rose; "and they don't find it so very dull; besides, I am tiring of so much gayety—I shall appreciate a month's quiet."

Celia held up her white hands with a gesture of disdain.

"You could never like what Lillian would care for," she said, and she wondered why Rose gave such a terrible start at the words, and why the book she was holding fell to the floor with a crash; there was certainly nothing in her words to startle her like that, and bring that hunted look to her dark eyes.

Two days later Rose and Royal had reached Peekskill. Celia, who had made many friends in Washington, took advantage of their hospitality to remain with them until Rose's return.

It was nearly dusk when Royal's carriage rolled up the broad avenue that led to Linden Villa, and the first face that Rose saw as she looked eagerly out of the carriage window was the sweet, pale face of the gentle sister she had betrayed.

She took Rose in her arms, and with tears in her eyes kissed the lovely face.

"Welcome, darling," she said, "welcome home again."

It was pitiful to see how Rose watched the greeting that passed between Royal and Lillian.

At the sight of Lillian's face would the old love be awakened in his heart? Had she done right in allowing Royal to accompany her here?

Lillian held out her white hand with a kindly smile to Royal Montague.

"Welcome to Linden Villa, brother Royal," she said.

Royal took the little white hand in his own a moment,

and replied heartily and sincerely to her greeting, then turned to Rose, and the smile that crept into his eyes as they rested upon her bespoke a heart's true affection.

"He may have loved Lillian well in the past," thought Rose; "but I thank Heaven that his every thought is mine now."

The next day Royal journeyed on to Boston, leaving Rose at Linden Villa.

Although Lillian had schooled her heart to meet Royal calmly, it was a relief to her when he took his leave.

Lillian had anticipated that it might be dull for Rose at Linden Villa, and had invited a gay party of friends to meet her. A ball was to be given the first week of her return, and it was to end in a charade, and one scene from a tragedy which was creating a great furor on the New York boards, was to be rendered by a company of French artists, who had been especially engaged for the purpose and sent up from the metropolis. A stage had been erected at the end of the ball-room, concealed when the dancing was going on by heavy silken curtains.

Rose was delighted with the programme.

"It will be quite a novelty, Lillian dear," she said; "I always liked private theatricals; but what is the scene to be? it is a pity to see but one act of a really enjoyable play; if the actors are well up in their parts perhaps we might have at least two acts."

"They have been rehearsing the third act of 'The Gypsy Girl's Warning,' it is more than interesting," answered Lillian.

It was a merry throng that gathered together to enjoy the grand ball at Linden Villa a few days later.

After the dancing, and the feasting in the beautifully decorated dining-hall was over, the merry guests waited

patiently for the *tableaux*, and the act of the great play to begin.

Rose was in one of the front seats which commanded a perfect view of the stage, every whisper must reach her.

The orchestra played a brilliant overture, the curtain went up, and the piquant French actress stood bowing a moment ere the play went on.

How beautiful she was, this imperial bewitching French beauty, and more than one of the guests started to see what a striking resemblance she bore to the sister of their hostess—Rose Montague.

Such a thought even flitted over the mind of Rose herself.

Pen pictures but illy describe the thrilling events of a realistic scene upon the stage, it is the tone of voice in its varied emotions, the wondrous play of the features and the gestures, as well as the spoken words which render the effect perfect.

The play represented a young and beautiful girl who had committed an act of unpardonable folly which, had it been known to the world, would have banished her forever from the pale of honorable society.

Yet, burying the past as deeply as though it had never been, she had dared to become a nobleman's bride and reign in the society world its queen.

One day in walking through the sunlit streets she chanced to pass a group of gypsy minstrels.

My lady passed them by with haughty tread, drawing her rich velvets and costly ermines rudely away lest contact with the poor street waifs might contaminate her.

One among the group—a dark-eyed gypsy maid—gazed upon my lady's face, and despite the trappings of wealth knew her, as she was in that dark past.

"Would you like your fortune told, fair dame?" she cried, glancing up into the proud cold face with her bright eyes and courtesying; "cross my hand with silver and you shall know the past, present, future and——"

"Out of my way!" cried my lady harshly; "how dare such as you address me!"

The gypsy girl's brows darkened, her eyes flashed fire, all the bitter resentment of her race rose up within her.

"Beware, my fine lady!" she hissed aloud; "you soar high to-day, but to-morrow shall see your downfall. A crime lies at your door; a sin is on your soul; and the wages of sin is death! No crime goes long unpunished."

White as marble grew my lady's face, ruin, disgrace, exposure, stared her in the face. To be thrown from her proud pedestal, to be sneered at by women, scoffed at by men, her lordly husband's love turned to hate, was more than she could bear. She drew a long, thin golden pin from the coils of her beautiful hair, and in an agony of remorse plunged it in her snow-white breast. Thus was the gypsy's prophecy fulfilled, the wages of sin was death!

Rose looked and listened, every sob from the lips of the hapless girl brought tears to Rose's eyes. By the greatest effort she prevented herself from swooning outright.

How eagerly she listened for the comments of the guests when the play was over. The scene had been so terribly like her own dark past. No one pitied the beautiful girl who had sinned. The popular verdict was:

"She must expiate her sin. Her death was a fitting *finale*, for it would have been unjust had she been forgiven and lived happily afterward."

Rose listened with white lips. This, then, would be the verdict of the world if it knew her story.

Once in the past she had tried to induce Royal to have the marriage ceremony read over them again. Let him call it a whim, a caprice, she knew why she wanted it done, of what vital importance those few words would be to her.

But it seemed that fate itself had a hand in defeating her—her pretty pleadings with Royal were quite in vain.

“I stood at the altar with you once, Rose,” he replied, “and the words spoken then bound us together for all time. In my opinion it is sacriligious to play at such a solemn ceremony as marriage. Once wedded, we are always wedded until death separates us. Say no more about having the ceremony repeated, Rose.”

She had ceased to urge her prayer long since. She had given herself body and soul into the hands of fate, let the result be what it might.

She lived her life, content in Royal Montague's love, forgetting the past and reckless of the future. Poor, misguided Rose, she deserved a better fate.

Like Celia Derwent, Lillian soon noticed the great change that had come over beautiful, willful Rose.

At times she was wretched almost to the verge of illness, then again feverishly gay, plunging into an excess of gayety that both frightened and pained Lillian.

“You are very ill, my darling,” Lillian would exclaim, “do let me send for a physician to prescribe for you.”

A wild laugh, that was half a sob, broke from Rose's red lips. How could she tell her sister that it was not a disease of the body, but her conscience which was troubling her so. She knew that she was standing on a shoal that might slip beneath her feet at any moment.

She had a great desire to know what Lillian would think of such a story as her own, if she heard it repeated

as an incident that had once been read in one of the papers.

It was evening—the two sisters sat alone in the drawing-room before a bright sea-coal fire.

“Now is the time, if ever, to tell her,” thought Rose, with a throbbing heart, but at the last moment her strength almost failed her, the terrible words died on her white lips.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Rose sat down beside her sister in the soft crimson glow of the tender firelight.

Lillian was trying to interest her in conversation, but her words fell on deaf ears. Rose's thoughts were upon a vastly different subject. She was asking herself how her folly and sin would look in the eyes of other people. She wanted to know what Lillian would think of it. She could rest no longer unless she knew.

“Lillian,” she said, thoughtfully, “the play we witnessed last night reminds me of—of a story I once read, and which I have never been able to quite forget. It was of a young girl who was coaxed—persuaded into a secret marriage.”

“A secret marriage!” repeated Lillian, shudderingly “How horrible!”

“Horrible?” repeated Rose, faintly. “Why do you call it that, Lillian?”

“Because it is,” declared Lillian. “No girl with any self-respect would ever make a secret marriage. I should think they only take place when the man who marries is ashamed of the girl, or the girl is ashamed of the man. Too much can not be said against them.”

“But, Lillian, if you knew any one who was married secretly—say a girl, for instance, like one of us——”

“It would be impossible for such a thing to happen to any girl like either of us!” cried Lillian.

“Yet, supposing a young girl did marry secretly, what would you think of her, Lillian?”

“I should think that the day would come when she would be obliged to expiate her folly!” declared Lillian, emphatically.

“I should like to tell you this girl’s story, Lillian,” said Rose, wistfully. “Perhaps you could not find it in your heart then to judge her so hardly.”

The subject had not the slightest interest for Lillian, but if Rose wished to discuss it, she would listen patiently enough.

Rose knelt upon the hassock at her sister’s feet, laying her dark, weary head upon her knee.

“It is a pitiful story of a young girl, living in a lonely, isolated place, who met, by the merest chance, a young and handsome man. He captivated this girl’s fancy—but, oh, Lillian, it was not the love that brightens and blesses a human life that beat in her unsophisticated heart; yet, she did not realize it then. They met in a very romantic fashion, and at the expiration of the first week in which she had known him, he had persuaded her into a secret marriage.”

“What a very foolish girl to have married a stranger, of whose existence she was ignorant one short week before! Why, it almost seems incredible that any one could be so unwise!” cried Lillian, becoming interested in spite of herself.

“I grant she was very foolish—pitifully so,” said Rose, striving to keep back the tears from her eyes; “but, oh,

Lillian, she was very young—only sixteen—and knew nothing of the world, nothing of life.”

“I should say not,” assented Lillian.

“On the same day that they were wed,” continued Rose, “the bridegroom went away, with the understanding that he was to come back within a fortnight and claim his bride. Long months rolled by, he never returned to her, and the next report that reached her was that he was dead.”

“The usual case of desertion, followed by a girl’s broken heart,” said Lillian.

“But that was not the end of the sad affair,” murmured Rose, “it was but the beginning of the end—the sequel was more sad than tongue can tell. When the bride learned of the death of this husband she had married in secret she tried hard to forget him; she realized then that she had never really loved him. Soon after she met one whom she did care for—one whose love was like the very light of heaven to her—one whom she worshiped with all the strength of her heart, with all the depth of her soul! Her one cry to Heaven was to give her his love, or to let her die!”

“It was wrong to idolize a man as much as that,” said Lillian, gravely; “no good could ever come of it, I fear.”

“You are right,” sighed Rose; “no good did come of it—it was productive of evil from first to last—but to continue the story: This unfortunate girl married her heart’s choice, and, on her bridal eve, as she was standing quite alone, a few hours after the ceremony had been performed, who should appear suddenly before her, without warning, but the husband whom she had married in secret, and whom she had believed dead!”

“What a sad, sad dilemma!” said Lillian. “Of course, she was obliged to go with him, was she not?”

“He had come to claim her,” said Rose, and the keen pain in her voice caused Lillian to look at her with startled wonder. “He had not heard of the second marriage, but, if he had, it would have made no difference with him; but, in the very hour that he stood beside her, vowing that she should go with him, the hand of fate struck him down to death. Then, Lillian, the real tragedy of her life began. A strange temptation came to her, blinding her to reason and to the realization that carrying out her plan would be to steep her soul in sin. She was not a wicked girl, this hapless creature whom a cruel fate had singled out as its prey—she was as tender of heart as a little child. Yet when this subtle thought came to her, that, now that this man whom she had believed to be dead was in truth swept from her path forever, why should she reveal the story of that dark past to the man she had just wedded, and whom she loved with all the mad, deathless love of her heart? She resolved that he should never know.”

“But,” cried Lillian, “the appearance of the first husband would render the marriage to the one whom she had that day wedded invalid; she knew that, of course, did she not? She should have told him the truth at once.”

“Heaven help her, she did not quite realize that, when, in a moment of madness, she flew to her lover’s arms again. The power of love urged her on—she was only human; she loved him better than life itself! She knew he would be lost to her forever if she revealed the truth, and death itself would have been easier to endure than that!”

“I can not quite agree with you there,” said Lillian.

“If the man had loved her—and of course he did, or he would not have wedded her—when she told him her story he would have taken steps at once to have the marriage ceremony repeated without delay that she might be legally his. Surely she was not so lost to honor—lost to the sense of right—as to continue to live with him!” cried Lillian, in horror—“surely she did not openly defy the pure laws of Heaven in that terrible way?”

“That is just what she did,” asserted Rose; and the wailing of the night-wind outside was not more piteously sad than the girl’s plaintive voice.

“I will not listen to such a story,” cried Lillian, utterly shocked. “A young girl so lost to honor should not be discussed by you and me, Rose dear.”

“Oh, Lilly, Lilly! you who are so pure, so true, so guileless should find pity in your heart for that unhappy girl. Remember it was love that blinded her; she was sure she would have lost him if the slender thread by which she held him, in the eyes of the world, had been snapped asunder; she felt sure she would have lost him. She tried every means in her power to invent excuses by which the marriage service could be read over then again; but the hand of Fate always interfered, and she grew reckless in her despair and accepted the situation just as it was.”

“What a wicked creature—worse than that!” cried Lillian. “Heaven will find no pity, no mercy for her when she comes to die; she will meet with just retribution sooner or later. Heaven could not, would not, prosper any one who was guilty of so deep a sin as that—to dupe a good and innocent man into the belief that she who shared his home, his love, and his thoughts was his wife, when in reality she was not. I wonder that God’s ven-

geance was not swift in punishing her, when by a few words on that bridal eve she might have made the wrong right by a truthful confession. Yet how did it turn out, Rose? there must have been an end to it, and a moral, or else the terrible story would not have been in the papers."

"No one ever knew until she died," said Rose, faintly, and she little dreamed that there was a prophecy in her words. Poor Rose! if she could but have seen the terrible future which her words foretold!

"You shouldn't trouble your pretty head with such sad stories, dear," said Lillian, brightly; "you might dream of them, and come down to-morrow morning pale and nervous, and that wouldn't do at all; for to-morrow is the day of our sleigh-ride party, and I wish my brilliant sister to look particularly beautiful."

She kissed her good-night, and the sisters parted.

Lillian could not help but remember how wan and white her sister's face looked as she kissed her good-night. As she passed Rose's room, half an hour later, seeing the door slightly ajar, she pushed it open and entered.

Rose was sleeping, but it was not a happy face on which the pallid moonbeams fell in their pale radiance. With gentle hands Lillian put back the clustering, curling hair from the beautiful face, but the loving touch of those gentle hands did not awaken the sleeper.

The white lips moved, and Lillian bowed her head to listen.

"The sin was beyond all forgiveness," the pale lips murmured. "Man could not forgive nor could God forget it. Oh, the pity of it—the pity of it."

Lillian drew back impatiently.

"I was quite sure Rose would dream of that ridiculous

story; her sympathetic heart was so touched by it," she thought.

It would have been better if poor Rose had died that night; then the thrilling event which was so soon to happen would never have drawn tears from those who had learned to love the memory of poor, hapless Rose, and who can still find pity for her, despite the act of folly that blighted her young life.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The next morning dawned bright and clear. The handsome double sleighs, with fur-lined robes and prancing steeds, stood before the door awaiting the pleasure of the gay party who were to take possession of them.

Rose and Lillian were just about to enter their sleigh when the postman appeared with the morning mail. There were two letters for Lillian—one for Rose.

"Mine can wait until I return," laughed Lillian. "They are probably invitations to a ball or a party from some of my dear five hundred friends."

"While they are arranging the robes I will see if Royal is well," said Rose. "My letter is from him."

She tore open the envelope and turned her dark eyes on the page. Suddenly, and without warning, a terrible cry broke from her lips, and without a word she fell face downward among the snowdrifts in a deep swoon.

In an instant the greatest confusion prevailed. Loving hands lifted the slender form and bore it into the house again. All thoughts of the sleighing party were abandoned by Lillian, though she begged of the rest not to remain, for Rose would doubtless have fully recovered within an hour. When Lillian was alone with the old servants, who were using every effort to arouse Rose

from the death-like stupor into which she had fallen, the first thing she did was to gently take the crumpled letter from Rose's clinched hand and read it. Had anything happened to Royal? Perhaps he was ill, dying. The letter must certainly have contained some terrible news to cause her to swoon.

The letter trembled in Lillian's quivering hands. She dreaded to read it. Yet she must know for Rose's sake what it contained, that she might know how to comfort her.

As Rose had done, she ran her eyes swiftly over the few lines contained in the page, from beginning to end. Then a look of the most intense wonder crept into her astonished eyes. There was nothing in it apparently to pain her.

Again Lillian read it over, not once, but a second time. We will glance over the lines with her.

It was dated at Boston, and ran as follows:

"MY DARLING ROSE—I arrived here safely three days ago, and hope to adjust my business matters so satisfactorily that I may be able to return to Linden Villa early next week.

"I see by the society papers that the ball given in your honor was a brilliant event. The special correspondents were warm in their praise of my beautiful wife, which made me both proud and happy as I read.

"By the way, I had almost forgotten to mention to you that I have donated a beautiful memorial window to a church in the village of Wilton, a small place upon the coast of Maine. The minister who married us, my darling, at one time had charge of this old church.

"Yet this is not the only reason why my heart turns

toward it. I do not think I have ever mentioned the fact to you, love, that my mother was wedded in that church long years ago; the record still bears evidence of the event. It will be a great pleasure to me to search the register for the names recorded there so many years before. I shall do all I can to promote the prosperity of the old church at Wilton.

“The workmen write me that the memorial window will be completed by Thursday next; I will take a run up from the city to see it. Remember me lovingly to all, accepting my deepest and most profound love for yourself, dear. Yours in great haste, “ROYAL.”

Lillian read the letter over and over again with intense wonder. She could certainly see nothing in those loving lines to cause Rose to faint. She could not understand it, and concluded, at length, that it could not have been the letter which caused it.

It was long hours before Rose awoke to consciousness, and when she opened her eyes they fell upon Lillian's pale, anxious face.

“Oh, my darling!” cried Lillian, sobbingly; “what in the world made you faint? We have been all so frightened over you, dear!” she cried out, in alarm at the burning hot hands that clutched at her own, clinging to them so tightly.

“You are very ill, Rose,” she exclaimed. “I am going to send at once for a physician. You are trembling with cold, yet your hands burn.”

“It is not an illness of the body,” sobbed Rose. Then she raised her dark eyes to her sister's face. “Oh, Lilly, you are so pure and so good your prayers will be heard

in heaven!" she murmured. "Pray for a soul in terrible pain. Sin must be found out!"

Lillian listened to the wild, incoherent words, believing them to be the idle vagaries of a wandering mind.

She touched the bell to send for a physician, but Rose sprung from the couch, grasping her hands.

"Send for no one, Lilly, dear," she sobbed; "all I want is to be quite alone—away from all sight and sound of human faces and human voices. Send Mistress Pompey to me; she will watch over me while I sleep. Every one else must be barred out—even *you*, Lilly dear."

Perhaps it would be best to humor her, Lillian decided. There was not much the matter with her; all she needed was rest and quiet, and she should certainly have them. Pompey, the old colored nurse who had been in Mrs. Hall's employ for long years, and who was fond of Rose, would be only too pleased to sit and watch by her bedside.

Mistress Pompey responded to the summons with alacrity. In response to Rose's whim, she had locked and bolted them all out of the room, and sat down in the arm-chair by the bedside. Then, in an instant, Rose had sprung from the couch, and was kneeling at the old servant's feet.

"Hush, Pompey!" she cried, sharply; "do not speak—do not give an outcry. Oh, Pompey, if you have ever loved me, heed me and help me in this, the darkest and most bitter hour of my life! I am in sore trouble, Pompey, and I can trust my terrible secret to no living human being—not even to Lillian, and not even to you, though you must help me. I am neither mad nor out of my head, Pompey. Promise me you will aid me, or I shall die!"

"Good Lord, chile," gasped the old servant, "I'll help

you, o' course, honey! But don't look up at me with sech big eyes. You ter'fy me—you do indeed, honey!"

"You must promise to aid me, Pompey, and to let no human being know," whispered Rose, her breath coming and going with convulsive gasps. "In Heaven's name, promise quickly!"

It was not in old Pompey's power to refuse her—no matter what she wanted her to do—the girl's piteous, tearful pleading would have melted a heart of granite.

"I'll do what you want me to do, chile. No one shall know. You can trust Mistress Pompey," she said, solemnly. And Rose knew that she could trust old Pompey to death itself. She would never break her word.

"I must go on-a sudden journey to the Maine coast this very night, Pompey," she uttered, in a whisper. "I must go as soon as darkness sets in; but no human being save yourself must know it. If you love me, aid me in this terrible hour!"

"Oh, Lord, bless the dear girl!" cried Pompey, holding up her hands in alarm. "You to take a journey, as weak as you are! It couldn't be done, 'pend upon it. Let me go for to do it, chile."

"No one could do what must be done except myself, Pompey. You are to remain here and bar out every one. Say to all that come to the door, my orders are they must not disturb me. It will be no untruth, Pompey—that is my order to you. I shall have gone upon my errand, accomplished it, and returned within two days at most. Be sure to see that the side gates are left unlocked at night for me, that I may have no trouble in gaining an entrance unobserved. It is a case of life and death—the price of a tortured, sin steeped soul. You must help me to save it, Pompey."

The bitter agony of the white face, the streaming, dark, mournful eyes were too much for tender-hearted Pompey. And when Rose bound her to a solemn vow that she would never betray her, come what would, the woman unhesitatingly accepted the trust.

Night came on, dark and starless. The snow, which had fallen silently and steadily since early morning, had deepened into a terrible storm. The snow-drifts were almost impassable in the country roads of Peekskill. It was the most bitter storm that had been known hereabouts for long years.

Yet, through the intense cold and the huge drifts of freezing whiteness, a dark-robed figure, draped in a long, thick cloak, her face hidden by the folds of a veil, at length made her way into the Peekskill depot and purchased an eastern ticket.

"It's a bad night for traveling," said the station agent, stamping the bit of pasteboard and tossing it out, noticing the slim, white, graceful hand, and wondering what the face was like.

Rose bowed silently, vouchsafing him no word in reply.

The train steamed in at last, and Rose boarded it, sinking into the first seat, trembling with fatigue and excitement.

Oh, how slow the train seemed to creep to her excited fancy! She was quite insensible to the bitter cold about her—her heart was on fire. Oh, if kind fate would but let her reach the old stone church at Wilton in advance of Royal Montague! Heaven help her if, in searching the register of the marriage record, his eyes should by chance fall upon what was written against her name!

She *must* reach there in advance of Royal, and she must seize the **old** record and destroy it—it was a terrible

witness against her. Surely Heaven in its mercy would not let her arrive there too late, when so much was at stake.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The sun was shining brightly upon the snow-clad hills and fields of the little village of Wilton, the next morning as Rose wended her way up the quiet streets.

She knew this was the day on which Royal Montague was to arrive there, but fate had shown her mercy. The Boston express was not due until noon, she would have fully three hours in advance of him, and in that length of time she could decide the fate of two lives.

She shuddered as she looked about at the old familiar scenes—how well she remembered that never-to-be-forgotten night when Osric Lawrence had brought her there, and together they had climbed the mossy hill that led to the old church.

A shuddering cry of horror broke from her lips as she thought of it, she almost wondered if she could be the same creature who had stood before that dim old altar while the marriage-service was read over her and Osric Lawrence?

Could she be the same girl who was stealing quietly there, praying that fate would not punish her for destroying all traces of that hated marriage?

Rose made her way up the snowy lane, starting back in alarm as she saw the old sexton sweeping the snow-drifts away from the plank walk. The door stood open.

"I should like to enter and rest awhile," faltered Rose, trembling so that she was obliged to lean against a gnarled oak-tree for support.

"You can with pleasure," responded the old sexton,

heartily, "it's a bitter morning, and there's a good cheery fire inside. A party of gentlemen are expected up from Boston; one of them, bless his kind soul, has had the old church comfortably fitted up, and not only put in a handsome window, but has paid for the winter's firing besides—a long life and a happy one may he have," added the old sexton, fervently.

Rose could not reply.

She crept into the old church, gazing hurriedly about her. Yes, she remembered where the vestry was, the first door to the right led to it.

There was no one to observe her actions and she crept silently toward it, gazing like one fascinated at the memorial window as she passed it by.

She entered the vestry gazing around in affright for the register. Yes, it occupied the same place, and it seemed to Rose scarcely more than yesterday that she stood there by Osric Lawrence's side signing her name.

With death-cold hands she opened it at the eighty-seventh page.

Ah, Heaven! There was the names standing out in bold relief—Osric Lawrence and Rose Hall.

There was no time to listen to the voice of conscience crying out against the wrong that she was about to commit. The happiness, the love, of a human life was at stake.

The names on the register must not appear as silent witnesses against her, a bit of written paper should not stand between her and Royal Montague's love, when the destroying of it would be so easily accomplished.

A moment more and the deed was done. With the page in her fluttering, terrified bosom, she crept noise-

lessly as a phantom spirit out of the dim old church again, out into the clear, beautiful sunlight.

Let Royal come now. She was quite safe. The old register would reveal the secret of that past nevermore! She was safe. Ah, how sweet the thought was to her!

She dare not destroy the paper then and there. She would wait until she returned to Linden Villa.

How she accomplished that journey home she never remembered. The darkness of night had settled over Linden Villa ere she reached it again. Most of the household were asleep in their beds as she opened the entrance gate and entered softly.

What should she do with the paper that still lay like a dead weight against her heart, she asked herself? Should she take it to her own room and burn it? That would mean the arousing of Pompey's curiosity. A sudden thought occurred to her. Why not cast it into the depths of the pond which the lindens skirted? It was frozen, but in the center she espied a broken space through which the water bubbled up.

Why not cast it in there? The water would never reveal the secret buried beneath its smooth surface. Besides she could make assurance doubly sure by weighting the paper with a heavy stone bound in her handkerchief.

It was but the work of a few moments to accomplish this. Then quick as thought she dashed it from her into the stream, remembering too late that the dainty bit of linen bore her name stamped in the corner. But after all what did that matter? The handkerchief and torn page were weighted so securely with the heavy stone that they could never rise up and confront her. No one would ever know of it.

Ah, poor hapless Rose! Was she quite sure that no one knew—no one saw her?

A pair of pale blue eyes had been watching intently from the curtained window the strange actions of the dark-robed figure among the lindens. The same eyes had beheld Rose when she tossed the bundle through the open space in the middle of the pond.

Celia Derwent—for it was she—watched with breathless interest. She had but just returned to Linden Villa that night quite unexpectedly, and had not yet retired.

“Now, what in the world can such strange actions mean, I wonder?” she asked herself breathlessly. “What could that white package contain that was cast into the pond? They tell me Rose is ill, confined to her bed,” she mused. “Yet, if ever I saw and recognized a form before I should say that the person who stood beside the pond to-night was certainly Rose. What could it have been, I wonder, that was consigned to the dark waters? I must and will know.”

Meanwhile Rose had silently entered the house and gained her own apartments unobserved, falling cold, wet, and exhausted into the arms of faithful Mistress Pompey, who had carried out her orders to the very letter.

Not a soul save Pompey knew that Rose had stolen away from Linden Villa so secretly, and as secretly returned to it.

Those who had come to the door in the interim had received the same answer: “The young lady’s orders were that she was not to be disturbed.” Even Lillian was obliged to submit to this decree.

The next morning Lillian went early to Rose’s door, this time she was not denied admission. Rose lay upon

her couch sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, the result of her wearisome journey.

How beautifully flushed the white cheeks were—the look of terror had vanished from her face. She opened her eyes, holding out her hands smilingly to Lillian. Ah, how happy she was, for the first time in her life she felt safe.

There was no fear of detection now; her secret was safe for evermore, she could have cried aloud in her joy.

“I have news for you, my darling,” said Lillian, tenderly; “we have received a telegram from Royal—he will be with us by noon—would it not be best, if you feel well enough, dear, to come down to the parlor to meet him?”

Rose assented eagerly.

“She was feeling better that morning than she had felt for long years,” she declared.

Never had she appeared more vivacious than at the breakfast table.

Those who loved her so well looked at her in pleased wonder; they quite believed that it was the news of Royal's return that made her so happy.

Celia Derwent looked at her curiously, saying nothing.

Early that morning, before the servants were astir, she was out in the grounds; she saw the footprints in the snow which led from the entrance gate to the pond beneath the lindens, and from there they led directly to the house.

“The dainty imprints could certainly belong to none other than Rose,” she told herself, “what had caused her to go in the darkness of night to the deep pond—what was in the white bundle she had cast into its silent waters?”

She made up her mind she would know ere the morrow's sun shone.

Royal came while the family were at breakfast. Lillian greeted him kindly, but beautiful Rose sprung toward him with outstretched arms that wreathed themselves tightly about his neck.

Ah, how dearly she loved him, this handsome young husband, whom fate had so nearly snatched from her.

He was just in time for a cup of chocolate, and as he sat down at the table, he entertained them in his own graceful way, by a relation of the incidents connected with his trip to Boston, and to the old gray-stone church at Wilton.

"It just occurred to me, my dear," he said, turning to Rose, "that you used to live in that vicinity—had I had time, I should have taken great delight in visiting your old home. I will take that trip, however, later on, when you can accompany me—perhaps you will wish Lillian to come, too."

He could not understand why Rose looked so pale and nervous, while Lillian appeared so pleased with the project.

"There is one other little incident that happened that I quite forgot to mention," continued Royal; "upon glancing over the register of the old church at Wilton, I was surprised to find that it had been mutilated. The sexton, whose attention I called to the matter, evinced the most intense surprise. 'It was not in that condition last night, sir,' he declared, 'for I had occasion to refer to it myself, and I am sure it was all right then.' Then he looked at me in a startled way. 'It must have been done by the hand of the strange young woman who visited here this morning,' he said, 'she came as silently as a shadow, beg-

ging to rest awhile in the church, then as silently she departed.' It will be a source of regret to them always that the eighty-seventh page of the old register is missing."

There were the usual comments concerning the affair by the family.

Rose sat through the conversation with a face white as marble. It was only by the greatest effort that she could restrain herself from crying out.

Yet she turned to Royal outwardly calm and self-possessed, but there was one at that table watching her keenly, who was not blinded by her forced smile—that person was Celia Derwent, who had already commenced weaving the fatal web of a tragedy.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

An hour later, while Rose and Lillian were in the drawing-room entertaining friends, a curious scene was being enacted in the grounds of Linden Villa.

Immediately after breakfast Celia Derwent had gone to Mrs. Hall with a strange request and a sad story: that at an early hour that morning a little lad in crossing the grounds had chosen the path by the pond, and that the treacherous ice had broken, precipitating him into the water, where he would certainly have perished had she not been close enough at hand to throw him her scarf and thus save him.

"Danger lurks in that spot, Aunt Margaret," she concluded; "and I suggest that it be drained immediately and filled up."

Royal Montague, who was present, listened with interest.

"I should have such a dangerous locality attended to by all means," he said; "Miss Celia is right, it is quite a magnetical spot for the neighboring children I perceive; it should certainly be drained and filled up without delay, despite the weather."

"If you think so, you might see about its being done at once," assented Mrs. Hall; "better to lose the pond

than to allow the children to risk their lives. Celia's story of the little lad's narrow escape there this morning has quite shocked me. It might be fenced around to be sure, but fences are no obstacle to the lads. No, the pond must go, then there will be an end of the danger for all time to come."

Celia Derwent could scarcely repress the smile of triumph that crept up to her thin lips. Now she would discover what the white parcel was that was cast into the pond by the dark-robed figure which so closely resembled Rose.

The sleighing was fine. Rose had promised to accompany Lillian for a ride, and together they set out laughing and chatting gayly. Never again after this memorable morning would the lips of beautiful Rose part with merry laughter and dimpling smiles, ah, never again.

Royal had declined joining them, giving as a reason that he had a little matter to attend to for Mrs. Hall, which would keep him busy during the greater part of the morning.

Heaven help poor Rose. The thought never occurred to her to ask him what that "little affair" was; he would have told her readily enough and she could have prevented it, but it was not to be.

He bent over and kissed the beautiful face, nodding gayly to Lillian, who touched the spirited horse and they shot forward into the feathery snow-carpeted road amid the jingle of the bells. Surely it was the prettiest sight that ever a young husband's eyes gazed after; then he turned and walked back into the grounds to give directions to the workmen who had just arrived, about the drainage of the pond; that part of the work would be quite finished ere Rose returned.

It was no easy task, yet experienced hands were about it, and the water commenced to diminish rapidly, and the workmen promised Royal that within half an hour the bottom would be reached.

"It was an ugly spot," they said; "and the owner of

Linden Villa was wise in ordering it drained and filled up."

It was the cheeriest, brightest winter morning that had been known that season; Rose laughed to see how the little children enjoyed it as they trooped to school that winter day; how their eyes shone and their red cheeks glowed, and their merry laughter rang out as they pelted each other with the new-fallen snow; how bright the world was, how much joy there was in it.

It was almost with regret that they turned their horse's head, at length.

They saw strange workmen in the park, but neither of them questioned what they were doing there.

Both Lillian and Rose leaped lightly from the sleigh, threw the reins to a groom, ran swiftly up the broad stone steps, and entered the house. Mrs. Hall sat before the fire, in her favorite chair, reading. Celia Derwent stood at the lace-draped window, watching eagerly over the white fields.

Lillian had passed to her own room to lay aside her wraps; Rose lingered by her grandmother's side.

"Where is Royal?" she asked, glancing around; and at that moment he entered the door, just in time to hear the query.

"I have been busy at work, my darling," he said, smiling, as he crossed over to her side. "I have been superintending the workmen who are engaged in draining and refilling the pond by the lindens; they will reach the bottom of it in a very few moments now."

The girl threw up her hands with a bitter cry—a cry so horror-stricken that it haunted those who heard it to their dying day.

"Draining the pond? Oh, God! pity me—pity me!"

Like one mad she sprung toward the door and wrenched it open. They heard her cry out that the work must be stopped. But it was too late; the hand of Fate, that measures out sure atonement for every sin committed, had tracked her down.

What use were prayers now? Useless—useless! Even

while she gazed, with horror-stricken eyes and pale, horrified face, one of the workmen was seen leaping from the pit with something white in his hand. Heaven help her! She knew what it was that he held in his hand—oh, she knew!

In that instant every nerve in her body seemed paralyzed. She heard the man's voice, like the rushing of waters, calling for Royal Montague, saying that a woman's handkerchief was found in the bottom of the pond, and there seemed to be something heavy securely tied in it.

Oh, how the poor soul strained every nerve to call out to the man—hold out her white hands to him and claim it—grasp it tightly! But in that awful moment Heaven seemed closed against her. She could neither move hand nor foot—her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth—the wild, anguished words of a breaking heart died on her lips.

In that terrible moment of bitter anguish, when she was suffering the tortures of death in life, surely some mercy should have been extended her.

Royal had followed her out in wonder and dismay. Then the workman stepped up to him and put the bundle in his hands.

"We found it lying in the bottom of the pond, sir," she heard him say.

Celia Derwent looked on in the greatest curiosity. No doubt Royal would tell them what it was very soon. In spite of opening it before them, he turned toward the library, unlocked his writing-desk, and laid it in one of the apartments, securely fastening the desk again, saying, hurriedly, "I shall soon have time to examine its contents at my leisure; the mysterious package must keep its secret until then."

Rose had a respite. No one noticed that she slipped from their midst—no one noticed the white-faced girl, with the agony of death in her eyes, who crept up the sunlit stairs to her own room.

It was of no use now to cry out for mercy—her sin

had found her out—in less than an hour, the lips she loved would blazon her story to the world, yet she would not have cared for the whole world if she had not lost him—the love of her heart, the other half of her soul.

He would learn that she who claimed him had no right to his love—no right to share his home and bear his name.

He would see that her marriage to Osric Lawrence had occurred before she had ever met him, and he knew—all the world who read the papers knew—that Osric Lawrence's death had not taken place until after that second marriage, and he would believe that she must have known all this and gone through the ceremony to dupe him, and how he would loathe her for it.

He would know then whose hand had torn the page from the register, lest it should ever appear as a witness against her—he would understand all. She would be driven from among them—they would never forgive her—even Lillian could find no pity for her. Oh, it was hard—hard.

If she had but told him all from the very first—if she had but told her story, and abided the consequence, how different life might have been for her. She had shadowed her soul with a secret, and the end had been that she had sinned to keep that secret, and the sin had found her out at last.

With unsteady steps she gained her own room. She meant to gather up the few jewels that were hers and fly from their midst, fly like some haunted creature from outraged love, humiliation, and disgrace, but the moments flew quick-winged past her.

Long and earnestly she gazed into the mirror that reflected that death-white face, alas, so beautiful still in all its pallid loveliness—there were few such faces in the world.

“All in vain,” she said, “beauty was given me all in vain.”

She had betrayed her gentle sister to win Royal Montague's love! she had taken him from Lillian, claimed him by a terrible fraud, a pitiful pretense, and within the

hour he would know how she had deceived him. He would know the wretched story of her folly. He would wonder in horror how she could have steeped her soul in such a deadly sin!

Oh, cruel power of love that had blinded her so to the sense of right, that had deadened the voice of conscience!

An open book lay on the table, and the first words that met her gaze were these, "Every sin must be atoned for sooner or later—it is the just decree of Heaven." She sunk down in a chair by the table. She laid her hands over the printed words to shut them out of her sight—they caused keen pain in her fluttering heart, and her brain reeled.

She did not weep now as she had done months ago, when she wept for the love that had gone out to another. The time for tears was over with beautiful, unhappy Rose.

She had taken Lillian's love from her, but no good had come of it.

"My life has all gone wrong!" she cried; "wrong from beginning to end! Nothing can undo it!"

She opened the locket she always wore about her neck, and which contained the handsome, smiling face of Royal Montague, and covered it with passionate, agonized kisses, but no tear fell from the burning eyes upon the loved features. Royal's eyes looked up reproachfully, accusingly, to hers. She dared not meet the steady gaze lest it drive her mad.

CHAPTER XL.

Few sadder sights were ever witnessed than that presented by the beautiful girl as she bent in an agony more cruel than death over the pictured face of the man she loved so well. No idle sophistries came to her in this hour to ease her conscience of one pang of remorse. She stood face to face with the sin she had committed. She saw clearly as she had never seen before what a terrible thing she had done in claiming Royal Montague.

She heard Royal's step in the corridor below, and a moment later the library door close after him. She knew what that meant, and she realized that in a few brief seconds he would be standing in her room, the torn page in his hand.

She had forgotten that she had intended to fly from him—to fly at once from Linden Villa, and cross its threshold never again.

A card lay on the table. She took a pencil and mechanically wrote these words to Lillian:

“MY POOR SISTER—When you read these lines I shall have left you. You remember the sad story of the young girl which I related to you a few evenings since. Oh, Lilly, Lilly, pity me—that story was my own! I feel that I am going. My heart is slowly breaking as I write. Be kind to Royal, Lilly, if I should die. In time try to make him happy, but do not let him curse my memory. If I have sinned I have suffered a punishment more cruel than death——”

Steps sounded without. She knew it was Lillian, and at the same moment she could hear the library door open, and Royal Montague dashed up the steps toward her room.

Rose's frightened eyes turned toward the door. A world of agony and piteous entreaty was frozen in them. The white lips moved. “Royal—my love—I—” The white fingers clutched the pencil convulsively. There was a terrible throb at that heart that had borne so much—a grayish pallor crept over the beautiful face—and the chord of life snapped suddenly in twain.

It was Lillian's hand that swung open the door. Royal was but a step behind her; and, just as hapless Rose had foreseen, he held the fluttering page in his hand, his face white with horror. He had read the record. He knew the pitiful truth.

Something in the pallid face so white, so still, so set, froze the words on his lips. Too late! Never again in

this world would words of anger, sorrow, or reproach harm her. Her ears were closed to all mortal sounds. The penalty of sin had wrapped its mantle closely about her—wrapped her close in the folds of death!

“Lillian,” cried the young husband, springing into the room, then reeling back with a horrified cry. “Oh, Lillian, look! She is dead!”

Lillian’s grief was as frantic as his own, and their cries soon brought the servants flocking in terror to the room. Royal Montague knew what had caused her death so suddenly, and his heart bled.

He saw the card on the table addressed to Lillian, which might reveal her story, and he transferred it to his pocket together with the torn page ere others came hurrying into the room.

The scene that followed they never forgot. Royal Montague could not be persuaded to leave the darkened room where the dead girl lay. He would have given his life to have saved her. Oh, how different life might have been if she had made a confidant of him from the very first!

He forgot her sin—remembering only how he had loved the beautiful, brilliant girl who lay before him with her white hands crossed over her pulseless breast. Nevermore would those hands caress him, nevermore would the dark eyes brighten, the tender, laughing lips smile for him. She lay silent—Heaven alone would judge beautiful, hapless Rose.

The funeral was over at last, and when all that was mortal of the lovely girl had been laid to rest, then, and not until then, did Royal Montague give Lillian the card which her sister had left for her.

Royal and Lillian were the only ones who ever knew her story, and they wisely decided to bury it forever from the eyes of the world. The words on the marble shaft that pointed heavenward, and around which the wooing breeze and the robins loved to linger, read:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF ROSE,
BELOVED WIFE OF ROYAL MONTAGUE,
AGED EIGHTEEN YEARS.
May she sleep in peace.

Celia Derwent never knew the fatal revelation the weighted handkerchief revealed. Nor did Willard Sinclair learn, when he read the sad story of the death of Royal Montague's young wife, that it was the same girl whom he had known as Rose Hall.

From the moment beautiful Rose was laid to rest, Mrs. Hall commenced to fail visibly. She loved Lillian—gentle Lillian who was spared to her—but, ah, Rose had been her idol!

She never knew the pitiful story of Rose's life. Lillian and Royal mercifully spared her the knowledge of the tragedy that had passed beneath her very eyes. It was better so.

A year or more after the death of Rose the dear old lady lingered, but she was never known to smile again. And when at last the end came, and she knew that Lillian would soon be left alone and friendless, she sent for Royal Montague. "I commend her to your care, Royal," she said. Those were the last words she ever uttered.

There was but one way in which Royal Montague knew how to properly care for gentle Lillian Hall, and that was to marry her.

At first sweet Lillian demured, tears falling like rain from her blue eyes.

"Oh, no, no! She could never take the place of beautiful, hapless Rose."

Gently he led her to the desk, where they kept the card Rose had written—that last solemn farewell—and he read Rose's last words to her: "Try to make him happy."

"Do you realize what she meant by that, dear?" he asked, gently drawing the slender, shrinking form toward him. "It means that we shall marry, if we can learn to love each other, and we know by past experience that loving each other will be no difficult task."

Her answer must have pleased him, for, on one of the outward-bound steamers that sailed for Europe not long after, were Royal Montague and Lillian his wife.

Celia Derwent never married. Perhaps fate showed an avenging hand in condemning her to a loveless life.

There is little more to add. Royal and Lillian are happy now.

They have been married several years, and two children bless their union—a sturdy boy with blue flashing eyes, and a little girl—a timid, beautiful little creature, with great dark soulful velvety eyes, a lovely face like the crimson heart of a passion-flower, and a graceful head crowned with a mass of jetty curlinghair.

The boy they call Royal, and the dark-eyed little maiden is named Rose.

Though Lillian and Royal are happy in their perfect love, and know it was the will of Heaven that they should be given to each other at last, in the sunshine of their happiness they never forget that other Rose whose memory is ever dear to them, and many a tear they drop among the beautiful crimson blossoms that wreath the grave of hapless Rose.

THE END.



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